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A STORY OF THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD

# HEEL-FLY TIME IN TEXAS

Written by  
JOHN WARREN HUNTER

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# HEEL-FLY TIME IN TEXAS

## A STORY OF THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD

As a prelude to this most interesting story, it is but proper that a brief history be given of the life of its author, John Warren Hunter. He was born in Rogersville, Alabama, August 10, 1846, and died at San Angelo, Texas, January 12, 1915. His mother died when he was an infant, and his father married the second time, and came to Texas when the subject of this sketch was barely ten years old, settling in Hopkins county, near Sulphur Bluff. He had one own brother, Rev. J. N. Hunter, for many years a minister in the Methodist church, and now living at Dallas; and one half brother, Rev. W. E. Hunter, a Baptist minister, who lives at Jourdanton, Texas, at this writing; two half sisters, Mrs. Newt Lyle of Roaring Springs, Texas, and Mrs. John Castleberry of Booneville, Arkansas.

When John Warren Hunter was fifteen years old the country was plunged into the Civil War, the North against the South. His older brother, James Hunter, enlisted in the Confederate service and rode with Forrest through the entire war. But John Hunter was not old enough to enlist; his father was true Southern to the core, and often boasted that he had one son in the ranks and in another year he would have another fighting for the Confederate cause. But ere the year passed things happened that dampened the ardor of the young man and caused him to resolve to never lift a musket against the old flag. Living in the neighborhood of his father's home was a man named Howard who was greatly admired by the boy, John Hunter. Howard was a perfect gentleman, and often gave boys of the community good advice, and was loved by every boy for miles around; in fact he was a real friend to boys. This man Howard was at heart a Union man, although he kept his own counsel and did not talk freely of his sentiments. But be that as it may, he was waited upon by a committee of Southern sympathizers and hung because he did not espouse the Southern cause. The hanging of this friend caused John Hunter to determine to avoid enlistment or conscription, so he accordingly secured employment with a cotton train hauling cotton to Brownsville, and, as a teamster, he set out for the Mexican border, where he spent the remaining years of the war, and it was here that he passed through the thrilling events depicted in the story given herewith.

After the war he returned to Hopkins county and found his father and step-mother both dead, and his brothers and sisters scattered. He went to Tennessee and there married his cousin, Miss Mary Ann Calhoun, a school teacher, and they moved to Arkansas, where he engaged in farming, while his wife taught school. Now it must be remembered that John Hunter had been deprived of schooling during his early years. He had learned to read, but had never gone to school. After the war he decided he ought to have an education and accordingly entered McKenzie College at Clarksville, but his restlessness soon got the upper hand and he left the college after two or three months' attendance. When he farmed one year in Arkansas and made a crop failure he was greatly discouraged, and was ready to come back to Texas, where he knew he could get a job on a ranch, for he was an expert rider and could throw the lariat as well as any good hand. But his wife's school was not out and he had to bide his time about returning to the Lone Star State. Finally his wife suggested that he ought to teach a writing school to help raise the necessary funds to move to Texas, but as he was no penman, could hardly write his own name, in fact, he was not inclined to the suggestion, but she was insistent and eventually persuaded him to "practice" writing from some old lesson charts she had used when she went to school in Tennessee. After several weeks strenuous "practice" he became quite an adept in making "flourishes" and with growing confidence in his ability to wield the pen, he went over into an adjoining neighborhood and opened a ten day's writing school, which was so successful that he



heard my father, who was loyal to the Union, say that the war then being waged would continue with increasing fury until the young manhood of the South would be sacrificed in camp and field, and that in all likelihood, before the close of another year, the Confederate authorities would be forced to adopt the course pursued by Napoleon during the last years of his wonderful career, and by means of conscript law force every able-bodied male inhabitant from 16 years of age to 60, into the Confederate army. Although my father had owned slaves and was every inch a Southern man he was opposed to the war, and voted the Union ticket when the secession election was ordered, but I had no negroes to lose, did not consider that I had lost or was about to lose any country and to make a long story short, I lit out for Mexico.

After a series of adventures and arrests, I crossed the Rio Grande in January, 1863, going to Matamoras which is on the Mexican side of the river, opposite Brownsville and about one mile distant. who, like myself, had fled from Texas to avoid the conscript law, and during my stay along the south of the Rio Grande new arrivals from the Texas side were weekly, almost daily occurrence. Being unusually apt in picking up words and learning language, in the course of a year I had acquired a sufficient knowledge of Spanish to talk on any ordinary topic. Brownsville was occupied by the Confederate forces under General Bee, who held the place until November of that year, when they stampeded and left on the approach of the Federals under General Banks.

During the summer of 1863 large numbers of the refugees—"renegades" they were called by the Confederates—gathered in Matamoras, and being in a foreign country, in a strange land and among strange people whose language they did not understand, as a natural consequence they became clannish, and having secured large quarters covering nearly half a block they lived together on the co-operative plan. The American consul, Mr. Pierce, came often to our quarters and held out glowing inducements to those who wanted to go north. Free passage across the Gulf and a large and tempting bounty was offered to those who would enlist in the Federal army at New Orleans, and free transportation to any point within the Federal

lines to those who chose to remain non-combatants. I begged the men to refuse service in the Federal army. "Boys if you can't fight for the South, don't fight against it." But my exhortation had little effect, and hundreds accepted the offered bounty, went to New Orleans and joined the army.

Shortly after my arrival in Matamoras I became acquainted with a gentleman whom I will call Mr. Cox, although that was not his right name. Before the war he was a well-to-do farmer and lived on the Colorado river about four miles from Columbus, Texas. He was a great admirer of Sam Houston, and like Houston and thousands of other patriotic Texans looked upon secession as the rankest treason and that it would overwhelm the South with untold misfortune and disaster. He was a plain, outspoken man, and on account of his adhesion to Union principles he was forced to flee the vengeance of his enemies—former friends—and seek refuge in Mexico, his family remaining in Colorado.

In the early part of February, 1864, Mr. Cox came to me and said that back home on the Colorado he had a span of large mules and that if I would venture that far into Texas, get those mules, and bring them to him in Matamoras, he would give me two hundred dollars in gold. He would furnish me a good horse and saddle and pay all expenses. He was running a hack line in the city, doing a general transfer business and stood in great need of the mules. A good mule at that time was worth \$300 to \$350 and there was none in the market.

"Well but what about the 'Heel Flies' Mr. Cox?" said I. "The woods are full of those pesky Home Guards, and I wouldn't like to be caught."

He assured me that my knowledge of Spanish would enable me to pass as a Mexican; that hundreds of Mexicans were on the road with ox and mule teams hauling cotton from Alleyton to Brownsville—Alleyton then being at the terminus of Harisburg, Colorado & Buffalo Bayou railroad and only three miles from Columbus—and that dressed out in a Mexican suit, I would have no trouble in deceiving the Heel Flies and getting out with the mules. He would give me a letter to his wife and also a sum of money to deliver to her and the letter he would conceal so that no one would find it, however diligent they might search. With route I could easily find food, shelter and

friendship, and that my expenses would be nominal.

I studied over the matter for a few days and being young and inexperienced and having a desire for adventure, where there was no prospect of fighting, I decided to accept the offer and so reported to Mr. Cox, and three days later I crossed the Rio Grande, clandestinely, some five miles above Brownsville, and began the long, and at times, lonesome journey to Columbus. Mr. Cox had provided for me a splendid Spanish horse, a good traveler, easy gaits, lithe, fleet and exceedingly strong. He had also furnished me with a good saddle, quirt and Spanish blanket, besides a suit of clothing after the Mexican pattern, that when donned, gave me every appearance of being a "puro Mejicano," except the light hair, blue eyes and fair complexion. I wore this Mexican costume without misgiving, being fully convinced that I could deceive any conscript officer who could not speak Spanish better than I.

I came into the main road at Sal Colorado, or Arroyo Colorado and pursued the main route to King's ranch, 125 miles from Brownsville. As Brownsville was the only port open to Confederacy the road was lined with trains of cotton wagons, and I had no trouble in obtaining food from these Mexican trains. At King's ranch I met a company of mounted troops, one of whom asked me about water on the route, while another bantered me to swap horses, but I answered in Spanish by which they were made to believe that I was an ignorant Mexican who couldn't talk English.

I crossed the Nueces at San Patrieio, where I camped with a Mexican cotton train. Close by was an ox train from my own country in North Texas, and I recognized two of the teamsters as old neighbors to my father. One came into camp and tried to trade for my pistol. He had a Mexican who belonged in the train and who spoke English, to interpret for him when he found I could not (would not) speak English. I had never heard a word from home since the hour I left and here were two men, only a few months out from the dear old home! I wanted to ask them about the kind old father at home, the little brother and sister, and the neighbor boys, who had gone to war, who had been killed, who had come home with wounds—but I dared not say a word; I must not make myself known; they were Confederates;

one had assisted in the hanging of the three Howards and two Hembyes—Union men—at Oxford's bridge, near Charleston, and as they did not recognize me, I could not afford to betray my identity. However these two men, with others of their train abandoned the Confederacy when they reached Brownsville and skipped into Mexico. I met them the following summer, and recalled our meeting at San Patrieio.

I crossed the San Antonio river at Goliad. Here I encountered the Heel Flies and here my troubles began. I had not proceeded half way across the public square when I was surrounded by about twenty boys and one or two old men, who informed me that I was under arrest and must give an account of myself. A few of them had mastered a few words of Spanish and as I couldn't (wouldn't) talk English, they could not understand me, and I wouldn't understand them. They took hold of my bridle and with drawn pistols led me to the commandant's office. This commandant was the enrolling officer, and a dapper little bunch of hair and bluster. I soon learned that he had no love for the d—d greasers. He had lived among them all his life at San Antonio and Goliad, and he could distinguish a Mexican from an American during the hours of the darkest night. He could smell a greaser anywhere and I didn't look like a Mexican to him. He thought he had seen me before, and believed that I belonged to that gang that lived over on the Medio. He called on a member of his company to interpret me but the fellow had to confess he couldn't understand me. Finally this little captain told his orderly to go round to some place in town and ask Miss Annie Inman to come to his office. Miss Inman was a fine Spanish scholar and she could tell mighty quick whether this young fellow was a Mexican. When the orderly came back he informed Captain Hair and Bluster that Miss Inman had gone out home but would be back the next morning. I was then ordered to the guard house. A man, or rather a boy, came and took my horse away while another squad marched me off to the carcel, the Captain taking charge of my pistol, saddle and blanket. In the guard house I found 12 or 15, about interpret me but the fellow had to con- could converse with; with Americans I dared not speak. From the Mexicans I learned that nearly all these Americans



and two or three of the Mexicans had been rounded up by the Heel Flies as deserters or as subjects to conscription. I was further told that these conscripts would be sent under guard to Galveston Island and put to work on fortifications. When I was first ushered into the presence of this delectable company, a loud mouthed Mexican began to question me, and when I told him I was a Mexican he bawled out: "Pue creo que estais Americano!" (I believe you are an American) I could have throttled the scoundrel, but I suppressed my wrath and soon engaged in conversation. He was under arrest charged with the theft of a saddle from a mule train that had camped near town, and as the property had been found in his possession, and as he had no witnesses to prove that he had bought it, the outlook was rather gloomy. He told me he lived on the river below Goliad and had been raised just across the river at old La Bahia. I asked him if he knew Mr. Inman. He said he knew a Mr. Inman who lived below town on the river. He said he was a good man—muy buen hombre. "He is a strong Union man," said he, "and is now being held in jail at Gonzales on account of his Union sentiments." I questioned him with regard to Miss Inman. "Miss Annie Inman is his daughter," said the Mexican. "She speaks Spanish like a native and is well liked by the Mexican people."

I felt relieved when I received this information. If the father lay in prison because he was loyal to the Union, surely his daughter would befriend me. If I could only communicate with her before being arraigned before the little captain all would be right. On this score I felt easy. But the Captain had my saddle, on which was my quirt. Now, if he got to nosing around and take a notion to tear open that quirt handle!

When the guard called for me the next morning I gave my loud mouthed friend a dollar and in return received his fulsome protestations of everlasting friendship. His name he said was Don Jose Pampelino. More anon.

I was taken before his august person, the little captain, about 9 o'clock and found a young lady, whom I took to be Miss Inman, in waiting. The captain was engaged with another case and with a wave of his hand motioned me to a seat near the young lady whom I engaged in conversation. I drew from her the fact that ~~her father~~ was a Union

man and was at that moment held as such in jail in Gonzales, the sentiment in Goliad county being so strong against him as to necessitate his removal to Gonzales. I then openly declared to her my true identity and appealed to her to help me out of this extremity. I told her I had "refugeed" to Mexico and that I was then on my way passing incognito to Columbus, on urgent business, and wouldn't she help me? She assured me that she would do all she could in my behalf, and when my turn came the little captain had many questions to propound through his fair interpreter, Miss Inman. I told him my name was Juan Montero de Garcia and that I was unpuro Mejicano; that my home was in Matamoras; that my people, the Garcias were wealthy and prominent and that I was going to Columbus to relieve my brother who owned and had charge of a large mule train, hauling cotton for the Confederate government to Brownsville. The brother had fallen sick and the father had sent me to his relief. Miss Inman interpreted my positive statement and then explained to the captain that there could be no doubt as to the truth of my story and that I was a full-blood, natural born Mexican, and I was released! My horse, saddle, pistol, blanket—everything was restored to me and the little captain—now all smiles and condescension tendered the Senor Garcia the most profuse apologies for having been compelled to detain him, and he hoped he would pardon and forget the seeming indignities he had suffered. It was one of the most unfortunate exigencies of the war, etc.

I never met a more worthy patriotic girl than Miss Inman. Before taking leave of her, she told me where she lived on the river and asked me to visit the family home on my return, advising me to avoid Goliad in the future. I took her advice.

With a light heart I resumed my journey, little dreaming of the perils that awaited me.

It was my intention to follow the Columbus road via Hallettsville in Lavaca county, but a few miles out from Goliad I met a Mexican mule train loaded with cotton and from the "amo" or "boss" I learned that a company of Home Guards was stationed at Hallettsville and they allowed no one to pass without a most rigid scrutiny and not wishing to run the risk of another Goliad episode, I



changed my route, crossed the Guadalupe below Clinton, the Lavaca at Wallace's Mill, and reached Columbus without further mishap.

When the Civil War had advanced to a certain stage and the Confederate armies had become weakened by losses from sickness and desertions, in order to recruit the depleted ranks, resort was had to the conscript system which required every able bodied male between limit was extended so as to include all under 60 years—to go into service. There the ages of 16 to 45—and later the age were certain exemptions such as ministers of the gospel actively engaged in their calling, physicians, millers and many others. Also, the man who owned or controlled twenty negroes capable of doing field work was exempt. As a result of these legal exemptions, it has been said, that never in all our history has Texas had so many preachers and doctors as during the last two years of the war.

In order to enforce this conscript law effectively, an enrolling officer law effectively, an enrolling officer to assist this officer, a Home Guard was organized in each county. This Home Guard was usually made up of boys under or about 16 years of age, and old men whose age and decrepitude rendered them unfit for the regular service in the army. These guards were expected to assist in the collection of tithes levied by the government on corn, wool, cotton, and other products and above all to aid the conscript officer to hunt down and arrest every man subject to military service. They were expected to seek out and catch deserters, to do guard duty, and other tasks too numerous to mention. It may be said that the old men who belonged to these companies were nearly always laid up with rheumatism, or other ailments, real or feigned, and were seldom on duty, thus leaving the burden of service to rest on these embryo heroes of rustic chivalry. These lads were commanded generally by older men who were, for some cause or another, exempt from the regular service, but the subordinate officers from captain down, were usually beardless youths. In order that home and neighborly ties might not intrude to obstruct their line of duty, these companies were changed from county to county, the company organized in one county being transferred to another county and visa versa, so that no favors

might be shown those subject to conscription.

These rawhide soldiers soon became a terror to the people among whom they were thrown. They respected no age, nor sex, nor conditions. If they purchased an article and the vender refused the worthless Confederate money, he was denounced as a traitor, a Unionist, the article appropriated and the owner threatened with arrest. Returning soldiers, on furlough because of disabling wounds, received in battle, were held up by these arrogant striplings on the highway, their papers demanded and examined, and if they chanced to be well mounted and carried valuable arms, a flaw was found in their papers; these had to be sent to Houston or Austin for further scrutiny, while the unfortunate soldiers who had passed through the carnage of battle at the front had to remain in the guard house until their papers came back—unless willing to part with horse, arms, or a moiety of cash, in the event of which he was allowed to escape.

The Home Guards were armed with such weapons of destruction as the country could afford. Hunting or squirrel rifles of ancient pattern, single barrel shotguns, pepper-box pistols, an occasional rifle, and six-shooters composed the armament. When a returning soldier on a furlough or discharge was found with a six-shooter, it was taken as a forced loan. The owner was informed that while off duty he had no use for a six-shooter; that they needed it, since they were in active service for their country, and that when he got ready to start back to the army he could have his pistol. Of course he heard no more of his gun.

Such was the high-handed, outrageous conduct of the Home Guards, not only in a few sections but throughout the state generally, that they obtained the sobriquet of "heel-flies" on account of the stinging of their course to the tortuous proclivities of a pesiferous insect so well known to cattlemen all over Texas. No class of men, or rather striplings, in our great state has ever been the recipient of more righteous contempt heaped upon them by patriotic men and women of Texas than these Home Guards, many of whom may be seen today wearing the badge reserved for battle-scarred heroes at ex-Confederates' Reunions, and it is stated on good authority that some are drawing a Confed-

erate veteran's pension from the state and swear loudest because the stipend is not larger.

At the time of which I write, all the Confederate ports were blockaded by the Federals and the towns along the Rio Grande afforded the only open outlet for cotton. Brownsville, the most important of these, had been held by the Federals during the winter of '63, but these were being withdrawn to engage in the Red River campaign, and Brownsville once more became the great cotton shipping point, and highways leading from all points of the state became lined with mule trains laden with cotton for the Rio Grande. Freight rates were high and a vast number of Mexicans, who lived in Mexico, engaged in the transportation of the staple from interior points in Texas. Alleyton, three miles east of Columbus, Colorado county, was the terminus of the railroad then leading out from Harrisburg on Buffalo Bayou below Houston, and thousands of bales were shipped by rail to this point, loaded on wagons, and hauled through Brownsville, a distance of over 300 miles.

As near as I can remember, Columbus at that time was a town of some 400 or 600 inhabitants. It was, as now, situated on the west bank of the Colorado river in a beautiful plain, which extended back to a low range of hills running parallel with the river valley.

The Hallettsville road, by which I approached, having come into that highway a few miles out, descended into this plain about a mile southwest of town and pursued a northeast course. Here and there in this open plain were scattered stately live oak trees, the grass was getting green and several large trains were encamped, waiting to be loaded with cotton, as this was the best camping place to be found anywhere nearer Alleyton.

I had no trouble in locating a train encampment whereat to make my headquarters. Hospitality is a leading trait of the Mexican's religion; the stranger is never turned away from his gate, and he will divide his last scrap of tortilla and spend his only centavo for the hungry guest. It was near sundown when I unsaddled at the camp of Senor Neneoe Garcia, the owner of a large mule train waiting for a shipment of cotton from Houston. I received the customary welcome at this train and after supper I took Senor Garcia aside and under strict confidence explained my mis-

sion—told him all—and asked permission to remain about his camp for a few days and that in case of trouble I hoped he would help me out to an extent wherein he would not become culpably involved. Although a citizen of Mexico—his home being near Matamoras—Senor Garcia was in close sympathy with the Unionist cause. He cherished a bitter feeling against the Confederates on account of the murder of a nephew the summer before. He said this nephew lived on the Texas side and was conscripted into the army and, while stationed at Brownsville, became violently insane and was placed in the guard house where, during one of his paroxysms, he was bayoneted to death by the guards.

Senor Garcia told me that I was welcome at his camp; could stay as long as I desired, and that in so far as lay in his power he would protect me and render any needed assistance; that while I was an American by birth, yet, I was a Mexican by adoption and this being the case, if questioned he could say I was "un puro Mejicano"—a pure Mexican. He also warned me against the Home Guards. He said a company of some forty or fifty men had their headquarters in Columbus and that more or less arrests were made every day, and that owing to my fair complexion it would be a miracle if I escaped the attention of the Heel Flies. That night I slept well, realizing that I was in the tents of my friends. I learned that Senor Garcia's train had been there in camp three days and would probably be there a week longer waiting for the cargo of cotton.

The next morning I joined a group of Mexican teamsters and strolled around town. In dress and manner I would have passed anywhere as a Mexican and, although considerably bronzed from exposure to sun and wind, I was in a state of uneasiness lest my nationality be discovered by my sharp-eyed countrymen. We passed the quarters, a low frame building, where the Heel Flies were stationed and I took care to count all in sight—twenty-two only, and only five or six of these were men who seemed to be over twenty-five or thirty years old. The rest were mere boys, swaggering young bullies. We had occasion to pass these quarters several times during the day and I noticed that we were closely watched by the gallant soldiers. Late that evening four of them, well mounted, rode out to our camp and after riding



around the train with eyes alert, halted before a group and asked for the wagon master. The camp cook, who spoke English indifferently and acted as interpreter for the train men, was called forward and informed our visitors that Senor Gareia had gone over to Alleyton that afternoon and had not returned. They next asked if all who were in the train were Mexicans, and the cook promptly replied "Yes, alle Messiean; no gotta nobody but Messiean in dees train." Looking straight at me one of them said: "You are not a Mexiean." Assuming an air of the utmost indifference (which required a great effort) I turned to the interpreter with the inquiry, "Que diee?" The cook blandly assured them that I was a Mexican and couldn't understand a word of English, after which they rode away, greatly to my relief.

The day following we made our usual rounds about town and visited the only grogshop in the place. They called these dispensaries of liquor, "groceries" in those days, and in this particular shop a one-legged man sold over the bar the most villainous decoction of liquid damnation I have ever tasted. A number of Heel Flies were loafing about the place, some of whom were drinking and these were noisy and boastful, and I heard one of them mention the vile stuff the one-legged man was dealing out as "Pine-Top Whiskey." It was two-bits a drink, specie, and if there was ever a concoction that would make a rabbit spit in a bull dog's eye, slap his ears, and dare him to mortal combat, that "Pine-Top Whiskey" was certainly the real article.

Nearby this "grocery," on another street was what I took to be the office of conscript, or enrolling officer. I have no means of knowing just what rank he held, but he was a small man with a red face, peck-marked, and sported a big mustache. Every time I passed his office he seemed to be pretty busy. He kept a couple of orderlies and there was a small crowd about his place most of the time. To my sorrow I learned more about that office later on.

My horse having become thoroughly rested from the fatigue of my journey, on the third day after my arrival, I decided to visit Mrs. Cox and find out something about those mules and the prospects of getting them out of the country. Before leaving Mexico, Mr. Cox had giv-

en me clear and explicit directions as to how I should proceed from Columbus in order to reach his farm, hence I had no need to make inquiry, even had I been at Liberty to do so. During my two days' stay at Columbus I had not been idle. I had carefully noted everything of a military nature worthy of notice. The arms, accoutrements, dress, horses—everything pertaining to these unwarlike young bragadoeios—had been studied and I decided that I had not much to fear at their hands, yet I resolved to maintain the utmost caution and vigilance.

As before stated, the Cox farm was about four miles below Columbus on the Colorado. Shortly after dark I left the Mexican camp and soon found myself at the goal of my hopes. When within a short distance of the residence, I concealed my horse in a grove and stealthily I made my way to a point near the house.

I heard voices at the house and soon discovered that a party of merry-makers had possession of the home and were hilariously celebrating—probably the return of some soldier boy from east of the Mississippi. I found concealment in the shrubbery, sufficiently near the house to enable me to hear the conversation and the songs rendered by merry voices. They sang "The Contraband," "Girl with the Home-Spun Derss," and other popular songs of that war period. I remember yet a couple of stanzas of a song, sung with a spirit that night by three or four male voices. They ran something like this:

Old Honest Abe, you are obeyed  
For military glory;  
An arrant fool, a party tool,  
A traitor and a tory.  
"You are a boss, a mighty 'hoss"  
A-snorting in the stable;  
A racer too, a kangaroo,  
But whip us if you're able.

To me the hours seemed long and weary, and I suppose it was past the hour of midnight when the crowd broke away and left. I waited until all became still and quiet. A light gleamed from a window and I knew that someone, probably the lady whom I wished to see was yet astir. I realized that the crucial moment had arrived, although I was burdened with many fears and misgivings. I knew not how many revelers remained; there might be several of the

Home Guards in the house to spend the night, and in the act of approaching the mistress of the house I might run up against a "Heel-Fly." But at length I decided to hazard everything in an effort, and stepping lightly on the porch, I rapped softly at the front door. A feminine voice within said: 'Who is that?' "Is that you, Mrs. Cox?" I asked. "Yes who are you and what do you want?" came the reply in low soft tones. "I am a stranger, Madam, from Mexico, and have letters from your husband for you." In an instant the door was opened and the lady asked me to come in and be seated. I declined, preferring to remain voice, inaudible to any who might chance under cover of darkness, and in a low to be within, I told her of my disguise, my mission, and who sent me, and then gave her my quirt and told her to rip open the handle and she would find a letter from her husband concealed therein. She insisted on my remaining until morning, assuring me that she thought I would be safe under her roof. When I mentioned the Heel Flies she laughed and said there would be little danger from that source, and gave me the startling information that her son was lieutenant in the company of Home Guards stationed in town; that he had accompanied a young lady home from the party that night, and she was expecting his return at any moment. She assured me that he would not give me away, but would befriend and protect me as far as he could. I told her that her husband had advised me not to sleep under any roof after having crossed the San Antonio river and that, with the exception of one night spent in the guard house at Goliad, I had observed his admonition and that under no circumstances would I consent to sleep in the house where there were Heel Flies under the same roof and that I would go back to camp, but would wait on the outside until she had read her husband's letter. I then withdrew to my hiding place where I had been but a few moments when I heard the clatter of horses' feet and I drew the conclusion that her son was returning, and if he should prove obstreperous I might soon be in the hands of the Heel Flies.

The horseman came to the gate, dismounted, threw his saddle on the fence, led his horse around to a lot, and entered the house from the rear. I then went to his saddle and examined it, but found no arms. From the fence I drew near the

house and for one time in my life did some "eavesdropping." I could hear the lady's voice as if reasoning or pleading, and could hear a male voice, but could not understand what either was saying. After some little time the lady came out into the yard and said: "Come on in, you are safe." I made no reply. Her son then came out and she said, as if speaking to him: "I do wonder if he is gone!" After a pause she called again, "Young man, come on in, you are perfectly safe; don't be afraid." Moved by this assurance I emerged from the darkness and went in, they, mother and son, leading the way into a room where a flickering lamp—an old saucer filled with grease into which a twisted rag was submerged, forming a wick—cast a sickly light over the surroundings. I did not fancy the young lieutenant's looks. I soon sized him up to be a spoilt boy, a sour-natured chap, and not to be trusted, although he seemed quite affable and offered me a chair, but I noticed that he was careful to place his own chair between me and the door, where a shot-gun sat against the wall in easy reach. This riled me and I thought the best policy then and there would be to put on a bold front and be plain at the outset and I said to the lady: "Madam, I suppose you have read Mr. Cox's letter by this time and you surely know that I am not playing false. You have assured me of your protection, and on that assurance I have placed myself in your power to some extent, but I don't like the looks of things here and you, young man, don't you dare to reach for that gun. I learn that you belong to the Heel Flies up in town but your mother has told me that you are all right and I hope it is that way. Your father employed me to come here and I am working for your interests, and there must be no misunderstanding. As you see, I am prepared to take care of myself I know that at a word you can have all your Heel Fly company after me, but I want to tell you that it will be a bad day for some of you before you ever get me in your guard house." Of course this was in the nature of a "bluff" and I learned later that I had been too hasty and formed the wrong opinion of the young man.

The mother explained by saying that the feeling had been so strong against her husband on account of his being a Union man, that her son was compelled



to join the Home Guards to save their property from confiscation, and that, while his sentiments were like those of his parent, to all appearances he had to be a "good Confederate." The young man confirmed all she said and told me that he would shield me from all danger, and that I could rely implicitly on his word. When this point was settled the conversation turned to the subject of my errand. The lady informed me that the two mules, in charge of a younger son and a neighbor, had been started the day before to Fort Bend county on the Brazos for corn for the horses belonging to the Home Guards and they would not be back under four or five days. All the difficulties of the situation, pro and con, were discussed and it was agreed that I should remain incognito about the Mexican encampments near town, until the fifth day, which fell on a Friday, at which time during the night I was to return to the Cox home and if the mules had arrived, final arrangements were to be made for my departure. When this was settled upon, the mother withdrew to an adjacent room to prepare a luncheon and this gave the young man a chance to talk. He told me a great deal about the Heel Flies and their devilment; the tyranny of the conscript officers, and the hardships of the people. He showed that those who refused to volunteer and were arrested were sent under a strong guard to Galveston Island where they were compelled to drill several hours each day with heavy artillery and that, owing to exposure, bad water and poor rations, the mortality was fearful. He further stated that his company, then at Columbus, had been stationed at Hallettsville and that a company from Victoria, in which there were a number of Mexicans, was expected to reach Columbus soon and his company would be sent to Victoria. During the day, he said, he had to be with his company, but very often he had to leave to spend the night with his mother at home. He had seen me in town and his suspicions had been aroused as to my being a real Mexican; others had become suspicious and he had advised me to stay out of town. He further informed me that these Home Guards were serving almost without pay since Confederate money was worthless, and that on this account, the temptation to steal rob and take bribes, was almost irresistible. No one wanted to go into the army and those

who could get away were going to Mexico.

I enjoyed a well served post-midnight supper with that hospitable mother and son, and, although urgently solicited to remain until morning, and given every assurance of safety, I resolutely declined; bade them goodbye, and a short while before dawn I reached Senor Garcia's camp on the outskirts of Columbus.

The morning after my visit to the Cox home Senor Garcia called me aside and informed me that he was sorely afraid that I was going to get into trouble and that my presence in his camp might involve him. He said those "Soldados," as he was pleased to call them, were watching me and that he believed his camp was under continual espionage. The evening before, and while returning from Alleyton and passing through town he had been held up by a brace of the Heel Flies who seemed to be in wait for him. He was taken before an official whom he took to be a colonel, or some other functionary, who put him under some sort of an oath and quizzed him closely to know if any American, soldier or citizen, had been stopping at his camp at any time since his coming to Columbus. The examination, he said, was conducted through an interpreter who didn't know enough Spanish to ask for bread. He told them no Americans had been about his camp except a few citizens who had brought eggs and butter to sell, a few teamsters inquiring for their stock, and a few of the Home Guards. He told me he did not regard the oath they administered as binding and as he could not understand the interpreter's blundering rendition, and besides he wasn't sworn on the cross nor on the gospels, and furthermore, the man who administered the oath was "un hereje, a heretice." The senor was a devout Catholic. I assured him that I had no desire, whatever, to cause him trouble, that I had no fears for my own safety, but if it was his wish I would go elsewhere and seek shelter, a course which I very much disliked as a change to another encampment would tend to confirm the suspicions of the authorities and force me to leave sooner than I expected. He told me he wanted me to remain, but insisted that I use more caution and stay away from town, which I promised to do.

Later in the day the senor came to me and expressed some doubt as to my

ability to get away with those mules. What if, mule like, they should become stubborn and refuse to lead? I would have to neck them together and, and what if they should refuse to be driven? He told me of a young man who, owing to some misunderstanding, had been discharged from another mule train and was anxious to return to Mexico but did not care to go alone. I told him to send for the Mexican, and when he came it did not take us long to close a deal. I found him to be a comely young man of ready address, prepossessing appearance, and far above the average in intelligence, and he impressed me as Senor Garcia had said, as a man who could be trusted with entire confidence. His father at one time had been a merchant in Corpus Christi, where the lad learned to speak English; later he moved to Oaxaca, Mexico, where, on the breaking out of the War of the Intervention, 1861, the young man enlisted in the Liberal army. At the siege and capture of Puebla by the French in May, 1863, he was taken prisoner, later escaped near Vera Cruz, and with others, boarded a vessel and landed at Bagdad at the mouth of the Rio Grande, where he joined a mule train as teamster and later accompanied the train to Columbus. The name of that young Mexican was Ciriaco Lopez, and I must say that on that day began a friendship between the writer and that young man that has existed to the present day—a friendship that the lapse of time has cemented by renewed tokens of affectionate regard, covering a period of more than 46 years.

I remained close in camp all day with my new friend, Don Ciriaco, who gave me a history of his career as a soldier, and expressed his intention to rejoin the Liberal army on his return to Mexico. The next morning about 10 o'clock, I noticed an American boy lingering about the camp, carrying a bridle on his arms as if stock hunting. He looked to be about 11 years old. After loitering around for some time and seeing me alone for a moment he timidly drew near and in a tone of voice scarcely audible said: "Aren't you the gentleman that saw my papa, Mr. Cox, in Matamoras?" "Yes, Bud," said I, "What is it now?" "Well," said the lad, brightening up, "I am Jim Cox. My mother says for you to come tonight at 12 o'clock," and without another word, or waiting for a reply, the boy was off. I

called to him as he moved away but he only pointed in the direction of town, which gesture I understood to mean "heel fly" and he soon disappeared in the direction of the river.

Here was another perplexity. Those mules could not have returned from the Brazos so soon, and why should the lady summon me to her home at such an unreasonable hour? Could it be that her son the gallant lieutenant in a "Heel Fly" company, C. S. A., had turned traitor to his father's best interest? Evidently there was villiany abroad somewhere. I recalled the adage that a secret is safe in only one bosom. Here my secret was known to four—myself, Mrs. Cox, her two sons, and the Lord only knows how many others. I consulted Senor Garcia but he was equally puzzled, and could only forecast troublesome times ahead. He was of the opinion that there was treachery somewhere, and advised me to take Ciriaco with me that night. I decided to follow his counsel, and long before midnight we were in concealment in a grove near the Cox home. I instructed Ciriaco not to tie out horses, but to hold the reins in his hands and to be on the alert for certain signals agreed upon in case of distress, and we also decided on a place of rendezvous in the event of a separation. We had no means to determine the hour but having decided that it must be near 12 o'clock, I stealthily ventured up to the house, rapped on the door, and Mrs. Cox appeared. Her lieutenant son was absent and she had much to tell me, and for that reason she had sent her youngest son that morning that I might come and be warned of my danger, and hers. On the night of the party a young lady, who lived in town, had attended, and remained overnight. She thought she was asleep in another room but she believed now she was awake and listening. At any rate the "Heel-flies" were on my trail and they were going to arrest me as a deserter from Benivide's regiment, then stationed along the Rio Grande. Her son had posted her and instructed her to advise me to "make tracks." A squad of those "Heel Flies" had taken supper at her house that night. They had two men whom they had arrested in the river bottoms that evening and were taking them to the guard house in Columbus where there were twenty-two prisoners being held, most of whom were to be taken to Harrisburg on the next



train. She was greatly worried. She wanted her husband to have those mules; they were liable to be seized at any hour; even now they were hauling corn for the Heel Flies, but she saw no chance for me to escape with them. I must not wait another day; if I tarried longer I would be arrested. She had friends in Lavaca county, about twelve miles from Hallettsville, on the Lavaca river. If I could go there and wait she might be able to send the mules to me. But she had no one to send except the little boy, Jimmie, and she could not think of sending him so far alone. With part of the money I had delivered to her, sent by her husband, she could bribe one of the Heel Fly officers to take the mules as far as Lavaca, but she needed every cent of the money and, besides, the plan was fraught with too much danger. Exposure meant the confiscation of all she had left. I told her her suggestions were to the point if she could vouch for the honesty of her Lavaca friends. I explained that I had employed a reliable Mexican, who was at that moment nearby, and that he would take any chances to assist me. I would start the next morning and go to her friends on the Lavaca, while my Mexican could wait around Columbus until the mules came in from the Brazos. She could notify him and when all was in readiness, he, accompanied by her son, Jimmie, could start with the mules and by hard riding could cover the distance in one night. She suggested that the Mexican could get through without her son. I interposed the objection that owing to existing prejudice against the Mexicans he would likely be arrested if found traveling through the country with a fine span of mules, and I was sure my man would not assume the risk. I told her I had the utmost confidence in him and was willing to trust him, and that I saw no other means of escape with those mules. She consented to the arrangement, and in order of a full and comprehensive understanding of the program agreed upon might be had, I went to the grove and had Ciriaco accompany me to the house and introduced him to the lady. After some conversation with him, I could see that she was favorably impressed and, like myself, was willing to trust him. Every detail of our plans were gone over and arranged in Ciriaco's presence in order that he might clearly understand the program

and to the execution of which he pledged<sup>u</sup> his faithful service. This being settled upon, Mrs. Cox gave me directions as to how to find her friends on the Lavaca river. I was to go to A. B. McDonald and tell him my business and who sent me. Mr. McDonald, she said was an old pioneer Texan and an old time friend to her husband and family. At heart he was a Unionist, although he had a son in Garland's regiment, then east of the Mississippi, and a younger son in the Lavaca Home Guards, but he was a true man and was never known to betray a friend. Should I fail to find Mr. McDonald, then I was to go to Judge Riley Tate, Tom Hogan or old Dr. Poulton, all of whom were old Texans and friends to Mr. Cox, and from either of these men I would receive any aid I might need. Ciriaco was directed to follow the old Atascosa (corrupted into "Tuscaset") trail leading out in a southwest course from Columbus, until within ten miles of the Lavaca, then due west until he came to the crossing at Mayo's Mill, which was only four miles from A. B. McDonald's. After crossing the Lavaca they would come out in a settlement where they could obtain information. Having reached an understanding, we arose to leave when Mrs. Cox took from beneath a mattress the identical quirt I had previously delivered to her, and charged me to deliver it back to her husband. I really promised, and without further ceremony, bade this noble lady goodbye, not knowing that I would ever see her again.

Next morning Ciriaco assisted in my preparations for departure. When mounted I usually carried my pistol in my morral where it was quite convenient in case of need. On this particular morning I placed my pistol in this morral and over it I placed a package containing lunch, and one or two other small articles, thus hiding the weapon from view. My reasons for doing this was to make it appear that I was an unarmed traveler. While making this preparation, Ciriaco asked me to accompany him to the wagon train in which he had served and ascertain when he could get some money yet due him. If he could get the wagon master to agree to pay him on a certain day, then I would know when to expect him on the Lavaca with the mules. I consented and, after taking leave of the kind Senor Garcia, we rode away to the encampment which was

about 500 yards distant. As we mounted I noticed an unusual number of horses and mules about that train and called Ciriaeo's attention to the matter, but he suggested that perhaps his former boss was getting ready to load up. There were 25 or 30 large wagons in this train and, according to custom while in camp, these wagons were corralled for convenience and protection. While approaching, we could not get a view of this corral, but as we came nearer I noticed several horses saddled near the entrance. This looked suspicious, but Ciriaeo scouted the idea of danger. We rode through the "puerto" or gateway of this corral to find ourselves covered with more than a dozen guns and six-shooters in the hands of as many "Heel-flies," the most brigandish looking set of boys I ever faced. "Throw up yer hands, Mister Mexican-White-Man! Hit's you we want. Been a-looking fer ye right smart while. Got ye now!" I asked Ciriaeo to speak to those men and find out what they wanted. I saw an amused look about my Mexican's face and was a little surprised at his coolness when he said: "Thees Mexican don'ta spek Ingles; he don'ta un'stan' what for you wanta heem." "The hell you say," snorted a lean, cadaverous long-hungry, flourishing an old pepper-box pistol.

"If he can't talk 'Merican, we'll larn 'im. But he can spout it all right when he wants to an' 'fore we git done with him he'll bleat 'er out fast. Cap'n Baker can spit the Mex'ean lingo some hisself and he'll soon find out if he is a greaser or a Cajen." By this time they had siezed my horse by the bridle, and with their villianous guns held almost against me, they mounted and marched me off towards town. They made no effort to search me for arms, and as we started, I turned and called back to Ciriaeo: "Hasta luego, Caballero! No ha riesgo, estos malditos no son peligrosos!" and with a wave of the hand my man shouted back: "Ojala, Compadre! Ojala!"

As before stated, I had concealed my pistol in a morral which hung at my saddle bow. I wore a close fitting ornamented Mexican jacket, or roundabout, and in this garb it could be plainly seen that I was unarmed. At no time had I worn my pistol while in Columbus, as I knew the cupidity of these "Heel-flies" and not having seen me armed at any time, I suppose accounts for the

fact that when arrested they made no attempt to search me.

As we started out from the train, one of these tail-enders of Home Guard manhood tied a rope around my horse's neck and bound the other end to the horn of his saddle and when his brave companions mentioned the fact that such procedure was useless, as they had their guns on me and a man on each side, one holding my bridle and others in rear and front, and that I could not possibly escape, he answered by saying: "Can't be too keeful. They haint no tellin' 'bout these greasers, an' this dandy lookin' feller might rattle his hocks if he gits half a chance." And then came a wrangle as to who should have my horse, one or two claiming that this fellow had placed his rope on the animal in order that he might have a better chance.

A thousand thoughts oppressed me as we rode toward town. Chagrin possessed me, in that I had deliberately rode into a trap and had been caught like a rat, and that, too, by a gang of ragamuffins too contemptible for a pelone dog to bark at! Then came an oppressive sense of dread. They had boasted that Captain Baker "could spit the greaser lingo too." Evidently, Captain Baker was the gentleman whom I had sized up as being the provost marshal, and what if he should prove to be a better scholar than I? With these thoughts and forebodings, Matamoras never seemed so far and Galveston Island so near on that cloudy morning at Columbus, and the prospect of involuntary servitude as a soldier in the Confederate army became oppressively glowing.

When we had reached Baker's office, which was about a block and a half from the building used as barraeks and in a northwest course from the public square, the office fronting north, my captors removed the rope from my horse and dismounted and as they did so, Captain Baker came out, congratulated them on my capture and dismissed them, leaving me in charge of a gander-eyed chap who seemed to be on duty at the office door. From the conversation I overheard, it seemed these fellows had been out on a scout since the evening before, and hence their dismissal to quarters when we arrived at the office. I had dismounted with the rest and as



they rode off my new custodian, by words and signs, directed me to hitch my horse to a post which stood about 25 feet from the office door in the direction of the court house square. I made note of this and, in fact, all the surroundings with an eye to escape.

Several loiterers had collected by this time and it was interesting to hear their rude comment, "He don't look like a Mexican!" "He's a deserter trying to get to Mexico!" "Captain Baker can beat any Mexican talking Spanish and he'll find out mighty quick what he is!" These and other remarks went the round and, in effect, were anything but encouraging.

The sentinel directed me into the august presence of Captain Baker. His office was a little box concern, about 14x18 feet, with a door opening north on the street and an open window, without sash, on the right of the door. On a pine table, at which his Highness sat, were a lot of papers, an old sword and a villainous looking Colt's pistol. I was offered no seat. The loiterers crowded into the room and I was kept standing, waiting, while the captain seemed to be busy looking over some papers. Finally he pushed them aside and fixing a steady gaze upon me, as if trying to read my thoughts, he said gruffly: "So you claim to be a Mexican, eh?" With cool assurance I replied: "No entiendo, Senor, no hablo la idioma Ingles." (I do not understand sir; I do not speak English.) "You no understand, eh? You vive in Mexico? Comy sammy?" (What is your name?) These three questions, fired almost simultaneously, revealed the man I had to deal with and I could have shouted with laughter. Here was the dreaded official who could "spit Spanish" and could put a Mexican to shame talking the "greaser lingo!" "Comy sammy" for "como se llama," was the key to his ignorance of the Spanish language, and I felt secure on that score. However, in his broken, blundering way he proceeded with the examination. He took down my name, or rather the name I gave—Juan Montero de Garcia—and questioned me as to my nationality. With a mixture of bad English and Spanish he said my blue eyes, fair skin and light hair betrayed me, and that he did not believe I was a Mexican. I told him that there were many Mexicans who had complexions as fair as any American; that I had come

to Columbus on honorable business; that I had made no attempt at concealment but, as he well knew, I had appeared daily on the streets with my companions and that I had plenty of witnesses to prove that I was "un puro Mejicano." When I mentioned "testigos" (witnesses) a new light seemed to dawn on his befuddled mind and, throwing down his pen, he said: "All right go bring your witnesses. You say your father is here, bring him along too. (I had not told him my father was there.) You may be a Mexican but I don't believe it. And see that your witnesses tell the truth. You bring a lot of greasers in here to lie for you and I'll have every one of you shot. Do you understand me?" During this "preliminary" a man was brought into the room wearing a ball and chain and guarded by two of the "Heel-fly" lads. He was a brigandish-looking individual and I wondered how these little milksop soldiers ever managed to catch him. He appeared to be a prisoner of notoriety and the little room was soon filled with a motley crowd of "Heel-fies" and others, among whom I noticed Lieutenant Cox. As I turned to push my way through the crowd to the door the captain said: "Lieutenant, this Mexican has one hour to bring in his witnesses. See that he has them here in that time." Cox paused just outside the door, while I proceeded to my horse and was in the act of unhitching when the man on guard at the door threw a rusty old shot gun down on me and said: "Let that ar horse alone; leave 'im right whar he's a-standin'!" Lieut. Cox repeated the order and advanced to where I was standing, swaggering, an swearing but when close to me he said in an under-tone: "Leave your horse; go round the block—watch your chance." Cox's movement attracted the attention of the crowd on the outside and with a "Si, senor teniente; ya me voy." I walked briskly away.

I kept up this brisk walk, not daring to look back, until I reached the corner of the block, where, instead of going on in the direction of Senor Garcia's camp, I turned south and slackened my gait to a slow walk. When I reached the next corner I turned east, continuing as directed by Lieutenant Cox, around the block. When I reached the street leading past the captain's office I saw that every man on the outside had crowded into the door and the window, craning

their necks to see and hear what was going on within. They seemed oblivious to everything outside that office; even the sentinel was not in sight, and I supposed they had crowded him out of the doorway. The man with the ball and chain evidently was on trial and the importance of his case had overshadowed that of the man who claimed to be a Mexican. My horse stood as I had left him at the hitching post, only a few steps from the corner. I had been instructed by one having authority to watch my chance. Here it was, and I took it. I mounted my horse and rode slowly away until I had turned the corner, out of view of those at the little office, and I was off.

While sauntering around that block before securing my horse, I surveyed the surroundings and decided upon my course. To the southwest and west for quite a distance was the open plain, a large portion of which was in full view of the building occupied as barracks by the "Heel-flies" and also the corral and guard house where a sentinel stood guard. It would not do to try to escape across that open plain. Just below town there was a large field extending along the river to the edge of the village and a road led out from town between the field fence and the bank of the river. In this field there was a depression, or shallow slough, extending from the northwest corner of the field, diagonally in the direction of the south boundary of the enclosure, which latter I would guess contained a hundred acres more or less. When the river was swollen, its waters backed up and cornered this slough. I had noted this field and the road leading out and along the river bank, while loitering in town a few days before, but I had not traveled over it.

I chose the river route, aiming to reach the wooded river bottoms below the field. This route necessarily lead me across the court house square, just before turning into which, I saw a body of eight or ten horsemen leaving the square on another street and going in the direction of the captain's office. These appeared to be men—not boys,—they were well mounted, and one rode a large white horse. I turned aside and waited several minutes for these men to get out of sight, and by this act I lost valuable time, which came near being my undoing. In fact, it seems they had reached the office before I got across the

square and evidently I had been seen while trying to avoid them. At all events, my sudden flight had doubtless been discovered about the time they rode up to the captain's office. To avoid attracting notice, I rode in a trot across the court house square and when I turned into the old road leading down the river I put my horse at a good speed and had gone but a short distance when to my utter chagrin, I found that a recent rise in the Colorado had washed out the bank up to the level. The road had come to the "jumping off" place. The fence was of rails and "staked and ridged." I rode up and tried to throw off some of the rails; failing in the effort, I had to dismount and finally succeeded in tearing down the fence so that my horse could leap over into the field. I remounted and as my horse vaulted over the fence, my morral became unfastened and fell to the ground, causing another moments delay while recovering it. All this consumed time, and seconds were most precious just then. When I had secured my morral I heard the sound of horses' feet and glancing back, lo and behold, there came those wicked "Heel-flies!" There were four of them and they were coming down the road at full speed, not over 250 yards distant, and when they saw that I had discovered them, they opened fire with their pistols even at that great distance, and began yelling at me to halt and surrender.

The recent rise in the Colorado had filled the slough, or draw, in the field with water which now stands in places, although the waters of the river had subsided. The draw remained a slough of mud and slime and had the appearance of an unfathomable bog, but as I was hemmed and cornered I must cross it or be captured. It was my only means of escape and I was fully determined not to be caught again by those tatterdemaleons. My resolve was formed on the instant and putting spurs to my horse, he was soon to his flank in mud and slime. My valiant pursuers were still blazing away at me and as their bullets did not knock any mud or water in my face, I wondered if they were only firing into the air merely to make a noise and to keep up the excitement. The width of this bog could not have exceeded forty feet and it was only after a most desperate struggle that my horse reached the opposite side where the ground was firm.



When once across the swag, horse and rider covered with mud, I turned to see how my pursuers were progressing. They had reached the gap I had made in the fence and one of the rascals had dismounted to throw off a rail or two. When I saw this, I felt greatly relieved. My horse had leaped through that gap with all the ease and when I saw that, in order to get their nags over, they had to throw off more rails, I knew that such an outfit could never catch me. In truth, I became amused at the thought and like little wanton boys in the sport of playing "base," I was ready to give them a dare."

In order to escape any stray bullets which might accidentally hit me, I galloped off a short distance in the direction of the west string of the field fence which bordered on the open plain below and southwest of town. Here I halted, turned and faced the gallinipper quartette to see if they hadn't any more sense than to ride out in that mud hole. When they saw this movement they halted near the edge of that bog and with a profusion of great oaths ordered me to recross and surrender, else they would come over and get me, and in less than no time I would be in h—l. I turned my horse as if to light out, seeing which, the four bravos dashed like ducks into that bog. I stood to see the fun, and to witness the struggles of those poor boys and their beasts would have been pitiful under other circumstances, yet, I was so amused and elated over their discomfiture that I shouted with merriment. It was a sight long to be remembered. Three of the poor nags became hopelessly bogged and the antics of those three defenders of their country, while floundering around in that slime and mud, was a sight to make a sphinx roar with laughter. The ludicrous phase of the situation caused me to forget all caution, which came near proving my ruin. Only one horse and rider made it across to solid ground and seeing their sad plight I was seized with foolish impulse to capture the whole squad. With drawn pistol and a whoop I bore down on the young chap who had reached dry ground and ordered him to surrender, and in so doing I employed about as plain English as he had ever been accustomed to hearing

while chasing Union men out of the country or guarding them in prisons. The poor fellow seemed frightened half to death, and throwing up his muddy hands, exclaimed: "For the Lawd's sake, Mister, don't shoot! You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man, would ye?" "You lie," shouted I. "Where's that pistol you were firing at me awhile ago? Throw it down or I'll blow out your infernal lights!" "Mister, I swear I haint got no pistol. I drapped hit in that mud hole. I haint a thing to shoot with," said he. "I have a notion to kill all you scoundrels; you have tried to kill me," said I, addressing the fou. One of them, all of whom were crawling back to dry land opposite, said: "We warn't tryin' to kill ye, Mister, we wuz just a shootin' to see ye run!" I could have killed each of the four, but had no desire to injure them. In truth I pitied, rather than censured, those poor misguided boys.

All this occurred in much less time than is required to relate it, and during that brief time a graver danger confronted me. While bandying with those slime-besmeared boys at the slough, I chanced to look in the direction of town and saw a body of horsemen coming down the west string of the field on the outside, and under whip as if to cut me off and catch me, and one of these was mounted on a large white horse, evidently the one I had noticed before crossing the public square. I wheeled my horse and sped for the fence—the west string—and without dismounting, threw off a few rails and my horse cleared it with apparent ease. When these approaching horsemen saw me make a break from the slough, they raised a yell, increased their speed, and began to shoot. I did not take time to count them, but I would have guessed there were at least fifteen and probably twenty. They did not all open fire until I had passed over the fence, by which time they were near enough to make their bullets whiz unpleasantly close.

Before me lay the open plain to the foot of the ridge southwest of town and where the Hallettsville road left the plain was bare of timber growth, the prairie extending to the crest of this ridge where a dense undergrowth set in, and

extended westward several miles. The race for life and liberty was now on, and the brush over the ridge was the goal. I had a fairly good start. I knew the metal and endurance of my horse and with the possible exception of the large, white horse, who was now leading the rest, I felt confident that I could outstrip them and escape. I did not believe they would shoot to disable my horse. They wanted him more than they cared for the rider. Looking back, when half way across the plain, I saw the white horse still in the lead and gaining on me, while three others were close at his heels. At the same time I saw several horsemen pouring out of town and I wondered if every Heel-fly in the country had joined in the chase. It was proving a test of speed between the white horse and the animal I rode, and before two-thirds of the distance (about a mile, had been covered, I found that the space was lengthening between pursuer and pursued. When I reached the crest of the hill where the chaparral set in, I turned to face the enemy. The man on the white horse and three others had reached the incline and had started up the ascent. A hasty glance showed a straggling string of horsemen—all enlisted in the chase. I waved my hat, gave a cheer and offered those nearest me a very profane remark in good-clear plain English, turned the crest of the ridge and took to the brush, safe, sound and free.

As before stated, the timber extended from the crown of this ridge, which ran parallel with the river valley several miles. This forest was a thick growth of Black Jack and other species of timber peculiar to South Texas, and after having ridden a few miles at a gait as fast as the undergrowth would permit, I slackened my rein and allowed my horse to recover to some extent from the effects of the chase. I felt that I was safe, for the reason that nothing but a bloodhound could follow my trail in that wilderness. I bore off in a southwesterly course and about ten miles out from Columbus I struck the old Atascosito trail, which I followed the remainder of the day. During the preceding twenty-four hours a high wind had been blowing out of the east, and about 1 o'clock that evening rain set in and continued in a steady downpour until midnight. This rain, driven by a cold east wind, chilled me through and caused in-

tense suffering. Late in the evening, as I approached the Navidad river, I saw through the sheets of falling rain a cabin in the distance and decided to seek shelter there for the night. It seemed to be a lonely habitation, with no other settlements near, and was directly on the bank overlooking the Navidad, which was considerably swollen and still rising from the day's flood of rain. The storm was too fierce for me to think of lying out under a tree all night, and I would risk the sheltering roof of that lonely cabin. A lady came to the door when I rode up and in a quick, hearty response to my request for a night's shelter said: "Why yes, get down and come right in out of the rain. We have not much room and our fare is very humble, but you are welcome." I dismounted and her little son, a manly lad, took my horse saying: "You are wet and cold; go in to the fire. I will take care of your horse." As I stepped on the little cabin porch the lady met me at the door as if to reassure me, said: "I live alone here with my three little children, and we are very poor, but I want you to feel as welcome as if you were under your father's roof." Cheering words! Words that every stranger and wayfarer heard on entering the cabin homes during the earlier days in Texas! A glowing fire burned in the little cabin fire-place and while seated before it and answering questions, I began to survey the surroundings. There was no fence about the premises, and through a small window near where I sat I saw the boy lead my horse into a little clap-board barn shed about thirty steps north of the cabin, and remove my saddle, which he hung on a peg. I saw him take my pistol from the morral, examine it with boyish curiosity and sight it at some object, replace it carefully, and start to the house. The lady commented on my costume and asked where I lived. I told her my home was formerly in Hopkins county but I was now living in Mexico. She asked me why I was not in the army and I told her I was a Unionist and had gone to Mexico to avoid the conscript law, and that urgent business had taken me to Columbus and that the Heel Flies had chased me out and I was now on my way back to Mexico. "My husband is in Mexico," said she, "if yet living. He is a Union man and had to flee for his life. We have not heard from him in a great while."



Searcely had she said this when one of her little girls said: "Look mother, yonder comes some men!" We rushed to the door and saw three horsemen coming at a run, from the same direction I had come, and one of them rode a big white horse! They were those infernal heel-flies, and I felt myself treed again! "Madam," I said, "those are Heel-Flies. I escaped from them this morning; I would rather die than be taken. Can you help me out of this?" "This way, quick! Can you swim?" she asked. "Swim? Yes I can swim the Atlantic." "Here get out through the back way. Swim the river, it's not wide. Get into the bush on the other side and you'll be safe. Quick!" I made a break for the back door, passed out, and hit the water with a splash that might have been heard above the roar of elements. The current was not very swift and I soon reached the opposite bank and with some difficulty scrambled up through the mud and I thought of the poor fellows I had led into the bog that morning. I found myself in a forest of wild peach trees, an evergreen indigenous to that region, with a dense growth of underbrush. It was now night and the darkness was soon impenetrable. I found a perch on a log and gave myself over to meditation. I was a blankety blank fool for having engaged in such an enterprise. I coveted gold and the prospect of getting it was gone glimmering. I was lured on by the spirit of adventure. I had about all I wanted in that line, and I swore that if I got out of that scrape with an unbroken hide, I would never be caught again in the Heel Fly range. What a fool I was to put up at that house! Far better to have camped under a tree, stood in the rain all night and held my horse by the bridle. But I must stop at a house to be chased out like a coyote by the infernal Heel-flies, and now they had my horse, my saddle and my pistol! Oh fool for leaving that pistol in the morral! They were at that moment quartered at the house not 100 miles away and were watching for my return to that barn shed. At dawn they would be abroad beating the brush and searching every nook in that narrow river bottom. They would scour the country round, and my capture was inevitable! Even if I should escape they would have my horse, saddle and pistol. These I could afford to lose, but there was my quirt. It would fall—had already fallen—into their

hands, and should curiosity lead them to remove the leather covering from the tube (handle) they would find Mrs. Cox's letter to her husband, and she would be ruined! Already she was under the ban of suspicion; her husband had been run out of the country for being a Union man loyal to his flag, and now a refugee in Mexico. The revelations of this letter would lead to the confiscation of all her property and she, with her children, would be turned adrift, homeless. The surroundings made me desperate. If I only had my gun I would recross and shoot it out with those Heel-flies, and recover my horse at all hazards. Here I was, sitting on a log in the rain, cold, wet and hungry, while some of the scoundrels were occupying a warm bed where, but for them I might have been sleeping in peace. To add to the gloom a bevy of owls set up a wild, wierd chorus in the trees overhead. It must have been near the midnight hour, when ghosts are said to go abroad and satyrs dance along the glebe. The rain ceased and a cold wind came down out of the north, an but for the moan of this norther among the trees, the chorus of the owls and the low "voice of many waters" as they swept along in the now swollen torrent, the stillness would have been unbroken.

I resolved to make one more effort. I was yet free, and to remain free I must recover my horse. I put into the river, which was now bank full. I had become so chilled and benumbed that the water seemed warm and gave me relief. When I reached the opposite bank I removed my shoes and, with cat-like tread, slowly approached the barn shed. I had secured a piece of driftwood to be used as a club, and expected to encounter a Heel-fly at any moment. As I entered the shed my horse gave a low whinney of recognition!

Groping my way in darkness I found my saddle where I had seen the boy place it, my pistol was in the morral undisturbed, and my quirt was where I had left it, at the horn of my saddle! What could all this mean? Could it be possible that those rascals were in the house asleep waiting for daylight to catch me? My first impulse was to saddle my horse, lead him some distance up the river, tie him in a thicket, then go back and look for the enemy's horses and if found to get off with them, but I gave up this idea and decided to first locate their

stock. I searched carefully about the premises and found no horses, and there were no saddles on the little porch nor about the barnshed. Going to the south end of the house, I discovered a ray of light beaming through a small crack in the wall of the shed room. Stealthily drawing near, I peeped through the aperture and saw the lady seated by the dining table, mending a garment by the dim light of a grease lamp. The fire burned low in the rude chimney place and the stillness was broken only by the wind which blew out of the north. By this light I located the doorway of the shed-room and at this door I rapped lightly. Without a word, the lady bounded to the door, threw it open and said: "Come right in! Aren't you nearly frozen? Where in the name o' sense have you been? I have been nearly frantic. I feared you had drowned while trying to swim that swollen stream." I felt annoyed at her loud voice; if the heel flies chanced to be asleep in the adjoining room her chatter would wake them and I might have to take to high water again, and, shivering with cold, I cut her off by stammering out: "Wh—whe—where's the He—Heel—heel flies?" At this she dropped the poker with which she was stirring the smouldering embers, straightened up and almost screamed with laughter. "Heel flies!" she fairly shouted. Then another paroxysm of laughter. Recovering, she repeated with emphasis and merriment in her voice: "Heel-flies? Why there hasn't been a heel fly on this place for more than a week and I dare say there is none nearer than Columbus. You don't hear of heel flies stirring out in such weather as this. Oh, you poor silly boy!" and this was followed by another outburst of laughter. But I was relieved and I did not care how much she laughed at me. I felt real sheepish at having been so easily scared off in that storm and I was anxious for an explanation.

With intervals of merriment over my plight, the lady added more fuel to the little fire and soon a roaring fire was blazing on the hearth. Changing her tone to a more serious one, she said: "Now sit over here and get warm. I am sorry I have no dry clothes to give you; sit here, and while your clothes are drying by the fire I will prepare you something to eat. Poor boy! I know you are hungry!"

Forty-eight years have spend by since that memorable night and never at feast or carnival have I enjoyed a better meal than that served by the noble good woman on that stormy night in the then wilds of the Navidad. Dried beef and coarse corn pone was the menu. It was all she had to serve and it came with a Texas mother's blessing, and appetite gave relish to the humble fare. While partaking of this repast, the lady, whose name was Mrs. Davis, gave an account of the causes that led to my scare and stampede. She stated:

"Those men you saw were not Heel Flies. In fact they, too, were running from the Home Guards. One of them is my brother and lives three miles below here on the river. My brother and one of those who came with him yesterday evening were conscripted about a year ago and detailed to drive teams in Johnson & Rhine's cotton trains. They made one trip with one of these ox trains to Brownsville and came near going over into Mexico, but finally decided to stay awhile longer with the train. This train wintered at Sweet Home over in Lavaca and about a month ago these two boys, with others, received orders to report for duty at headquarters in Houston. This they knew meant hard service in the army and they resolved to go to Mexico. They left the cotton train at Sweet Home and instead of going to Houston they came home, and before they could get ready to leave for Mexico they were reported as deserters and were given a world of trouble by the heel flies and were finally captured about a week ago and taken to the guard house in Columbus. They were to be taken to Harrisburg tomorrow—I mean today, as it is now past midnight and the beginning of another day—but this morning—I mean yesterday morning—the men held in the guard house made a break and all got away, and the three men you saw tonight were among the number that had escaped and were making for home and the brush on the Navidad. My brother, Wiley Clampit is his name, came by with others to let me know about his escape and some other private matters, and while here they told me about the stampede of the prisoners. They didn't tarry long enough to give all the particulars, but I gathered this much: It seems that the heel flies had arrested a deserter from Benevides' regiment at Rancho Davis on the Rio Grande. He



had been dodging around town and was being harbored by Mexicans camped at Columbus and was badly wanted. At last he was arrested by a bunch of heel flies and brought to town, where he made a break to get away. Every heel fly in the place except two, who were on duty at the guard house, mounted and took after the deserter, and when last seen they were closing in on the poor fellow and they doubtless caught him. One of the prisoners, seeing that about all the heel flies had joined in the chase, said 'Boys, now's our time!' and made a break. They overpowered the guard siezed all of the arms and ammunition to be had and rushing to the corral they found only eight or ten horses, and some with and others without saddles, mounted these horses and got into the Colorado bottom above town. My brother and Mr. Gollihar and Jake Hamersley, the three that gave you such a scare last night, secured mounts and struck for the Navidad, and—" "Which one rode the big gray horse?" said I. "That was Charley Gollihar."

In reply to my inquiry as to what these men were going to do she said they would have to leave and try to make their way into Mexico. She said her husband was somewhere in Mexico, he having been forced to leave or take up arms against the old flag, and that since the night he left, over two years before, she had not heard a word from him. She was almost wholly dependent on her father, who was old and poor and unable to render much assistance. I told her of my going to Mexico in order to keep out of the army, my mission to Columbus, and that I was the supposed deserter the heel-flies chased out of Columbus, and that I was on my way back to Matamoras and if her brother and friends wanted to join me I knew the road and could take them through; that with a half a dozen determined men I could clear the road of any gang of heel flies we might encounter. "Make them run off and leave their arms and horses, swim rivers, hide in the brush and keep company with the owls!" said she, with a laugh that betokened incredulity as well as merriment, and I was abashed by the force of the remark.

It must have been 3 o'clock in the morning when I tumbled down on the rude pallet that good mother spread for me on the floor of the little shed room. The rain had ceased, the clouds broke

away, the north wind roared without and I slept until awakened by the little boy just as the sun began to shine down on the plains of the Navidad. "You have no time to lose," said my good hostess. "The heel flies will swarm along the Navidad today in search of my brother and the other two men, and you had better make tracks." I told her I aimed to reach the McDonald settlement over on the Lavaca and remain there a few days, and if she would direct me to where her brother lived I would ride by and see him. She said her brother and the boys with him were well acquainted on the Lavaca and that doubtless they were at that moment on their way to "Somers League," a noted hiding place on the Lavaca river. They knew the Hogans, McDonalds, Tates, Heaths and Pontons, and that her brother was courting Miss Sue Chandler, who lived near Dr. Ponton's, and if I would be on the lookout I could probably see him before he started to Mexico.

Breakfast, the same humble fare—corn pone and dried beef—over, I prepared to take my leave of this interesting family. Before the war this noble woman, accompanied by her husband and parents, left Ohio and came to Texas and had begun to establish a pretty home in the wilderness when the war came on and the husband had to either take up arms and join in the slaughter of his countrymen, or seek asylum in a foreign land. He chose the latter and here, by the way of parenthesis, I wish to say that up to January, 1872, no word had ever been heard from him by his family. Not only gratitude, but deep compassion, for this poor brave woman and her little children, two bright little girls and the boy, Davy Crockett. These children told me they had no shoes during the past two winters, and their clothes, although tidy and clean, showed age and long usage. "If you see my papa in Mexico, tell him we pray for him every night and all the time. Mamma says God will bring him back to us when the war is over," was the message given me by the youngest of the two little girls. The mother gave a long message full of love, hope and Christian faith and trust to be delivered to the husband in the event I should meet him. Oh the short, simple and of times pathetic annals of the poor! I bade them goodbye and left them better than I found them. It was all expense

money, as I had none that I could call my own; at any rate it would have been all the same, and the joy of giving to that distressed mother and her little helpless children has lasted through all these long years.

It was a bright spring morning, the wind subsided, the sun shone bright and clear and the air was vibrant with bird song. I swam the Navidad and shaped my course for Mayo's Mill on the Lavaca. The flat prairies in most places were covered with water from the late rains, and my progress was necessarily slow. About 11 o'clock I came to a mott of timber where I found a spot comparatively dry and here I dismounted and allowed my horse to rest and graze a couple of hours. While he grazed near the edge of the copse, I lay down on the damp ground and slept an hour, when a shrill voice awakened me. For a moment I was completely addled, but when I recovered my senses and took in the situation, my surprise was beyond expression. My visitor was a woman! Superbly mounted, wearing a black dress and sunbonnet sitting as erect as a cavalry officer, with a sixshooter hanging at her belt, complexion once fair but now swarthy from exposure to the sun and weather, with steel-blue eyes that seemed to penetrate the innermost recesses of the soul—this, in brief, is a hasty outline of my visitor—Sally Skull!

Anyone who lived for any length of time in South Texas before the war, knew this remarkable woman, and there are those all over West Texas who yet remember Old Sally Skull, who was perhaps the only female desperado, during her career, that operated between the Sabine and the Rio Grande. Sally was once a Miss Newman, so I have been told, and was of good parentage. By marriage she was related to Creed Taylor and the Tumlinson's and for a number of years moved in the best society, but she fell and the remainder of her life was spent in camp or on the road.

Sally Skull spoke Spanish with the fluency of a native and kept in her employ a number of desperate Mexicans whom she ruled with the iron grasp of a despot. With these she would make long journeys to the Rio Grande where, through questionable methods, secured large droves of horses. These were driven to Louisiana and sold. This occupation was followed until the breaking

out of the Civil War, after which Old Sally fitted out a mule train of several wagons, with Mexican teamsters, and engaged in hauling cotton to the Rio Grande.

I met Sally at Rancho Las Animas, near Brownsville, the year before and subsequently had seen her several times in Matamoras, and strange to relate, she knew me when she aroused me from my sleep in that copse. She told me that her mule train was loaded with cotton for the Rio Grande, but owing to the bad weather she had lain in camp on the Lavaca near Zumwalt's for more than a week. Several of her mules had strayed off or were stolen and she was then on her way to look for her stock on the Navidad, and seeing a lone horse near a mott, she came by to investigate, and that accounted for her presence in that vast solitude. She told me that the heel-flies were numerous and active on the Lavaca and that unless I exercised the utmost caution they would sure catch me. With all her faults Sally was never known to betray a friend and I made no hesitancy in confiding to her all of my troubles and my situation. She told me of a spot known as Somer's Thicket on the Lavaca, in which a number of men had found refuge from the conscript officers, and that the heel-flies were organizing a raid on that thicket. She knew A. B. McDonald, Tom Hogan and the Tates, and told me they were good and true men and that I could rely on them. Bidding this remarkable woman goodbye, I mounted and hastened forward to the Lavaca, having received instructions from Old Sally as to the route leading to Mayo's Crossing.

Late in the evening I crossed the Lavaca by swimming just below Mayo's Mill. A short distance from the river I came into the road and fell in with a lone horseman and the "pill bags" he carried showed that he was a doctor, and such he proved to be. He told me his name was Bellah, and knew all the parties for whom I enquired and gave me directions to reach Mr. McDonald's. He asked me to what command I belonged and seemed surprised when I told him I was a citizen of Mexico, did not belong to any command and did not expect to enlist in any army. I had cast aside all disguise except my dress, and felt emboldered to face the situation now that I was in a region where I would find so many sympathizers and friends.



The doctor advised me to be on the lookout for heelflies, which he said were very numerous and troublesome, and if I remained long they would be after me. I told him I had heard that it would be difficult to catch a man if he once got into the Somers Thicket which, I supposed was somewhere in that section. He said that was even true and that we were riding over a part of the Somers' League and that along the river a mile below Somers' Thicket set in. It covered a large scope of country; it was densely timbered and was a vast wilderness of underbrush, vines, tanglewood, with long moss pendant from the larger timber, with here and there an open glade, and that when a man sought concealment there it was almost impossible to get him out. As a hiding place for criminals and outlaws it was equal in every respect to the Jernagin Thicket in North Texas, and there were quite a number of men at that moment hiding from the heel flies in Somers' Thicket. Most of them lived in that section and they had to stay in the brush, go to Mexico, or submit to conscription. They preferred the brush, as it was a long road to Mexico, and powerful risky. And thus the doctor rattled away, conveying the information I most desired, until our paths diverged. He kindly insisted that I accompany him to his home which was near at hand, but this generous invitation I declined, and an hour later I was at Mr. McDonald's gate. As I approached, although it was growing dark, I noticed that Mr. McDonald's farm was in the midst of a heavy forest of post oak timber and the house and lots were near a small creek. When I hailed at the front gate an old man advanced and when I asked if Mr. McDonald lived there he said: "Yes sir, this is whar he stays when he is around. 'Light an come in. Here Jess, take this feller's cayuse to the lot an' feed 'im. Come right in, Mister. Leave yer moral and quirt on yer saddle; the boy'll take care of yer stuff." But I framed an excuse and held on to my quirt.

And this was my introduction to Veteran A. B. McDonald and the beginning of a friendship that grew with the lapse of time and strengthened with the accumulation of years. From his own lips I subsequently learned that he was an old pioneer, having come to Texas with Dewitt's Colony, and for many years had lived on the border and had participated

in many battles with Indians and outlaw Mexicans along the frontier. He owned a nice home on Clark's Creek, and all Texans of those days remembered his broad hospitality which was extended to all who chanced to pass that way. At the time of my first visit he had a son in Joe Johnston's army. He had another son, Henry McDonald, a boy of about 17, who was a member of the Lavaca Home Guards; also a boy, Jesse, a bright lad of about 14 years. Four beautiful girls added a charm to this South Texas home, the two eldest, Lucretia and Lizzie, being about grown. I mention these members of the family on account of the part they played later in the serio-comic drama that followed my arrival in Lavaca.

It was about dark when I reached Mr. McDonald's and before entering the house I took him aside and told him my story. I concealed nothing from him. I told him of my mission, my arrest, my escape, and the cause of my coming to him. He seemed to hesitate, but after a pause he assured me that he would do anything honorable to assist his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Cox, and that I was welcome to stay at his home as long as I wished. "But," said he, "times are mighty squally jut now; the woods are full of soldiers and heel-flies, but I guess you'll be safe here tonight if you don't talk too much. We'll talk that over before bedtime; come in, supper is waiting." With this he led the way into the house and presented me as Mr. Garcia, the name I had given him. The son, Henry, was in the family group, as was also a man who, by his gray jacket and pants, I recognized as a Confederate soldier. This man was introduced as Mr. Harper.

The family retired early and being crowded for bed-room I had to occupy a bed with the elder son, Henry, while Mr. Harper and Jesse slept in another bed in the same room. After retiring, my bed-fellow became quite communicative and his revelations were not conducive to that refreshing sleep that my weariness and fatigue demanded. He belonged to the Lavaca Home Guards and had been on duty night and day for a week. His company, 25 or 30 strong, was camped at the Harless school house, five or six miles distant, and being in need of a fresh horse he was permitted to come home to get a new mount and would rejoin his company the next day.

The Victoria Home Guards and other troops were daily expected and when they all arrived the united forces were going to round up the Somers' Thickets and kill or capture the den of desperadoes that were there in hiding. When I asked about Mr. Harper he said he was a member of a regiment stationed at Velasco on the Brazos and with others had been detailed to run down and capture Joe Tate, who had been court-martialed and sentenced to be shot, but had escaped, and that his home, a half mile distant, was being guarded by these soldiers with the expectation that he would try to steal in under cover of darkness, and that Mr. Harper, being off duty, had come over to spend the night with the family. And along these lines the young man talked and expatiated until overcome with weariness he finally fell asleep, but the night was far spent before I could follow suit. My reflections were anything but comforting. What on earth would come next? Like a blockhead I had deliberately walked into another deadfall. A whole company of heel flies, well mounted and encamped within four miles of me! Another company expected hourly from Victoria; and yet another company of regulars on the watch within a mile, and one of whom was then snoring not ten feet from where I lay. But that wasn't all, I was in bed—actually in bed—with a heel fly, a young lad who had just related his hard services for his country trying to catch "deserters." He would return to his company the next day and as a matter of fact report my presence. What must I do? Some plan of action must be matured before morning. My first impulse was to quietly and softly steal out of the house, get my horse and go to the Somers' League and fall in with those "desperadoes" who were collected there. But of the refugees gathered there, I knew not one, and should I succeed in finding them possibly I might be looked upon as a spy and fare worse than if in the hands of the heel-flies. Finally I decided to face the situation boldly, trust my good fortune and take chances. The morrow would decide. The next morning my bed fellow became quite congenial and Mr. Harper was all smiles and good humor. He had belonged to Captain Liddell's company, Gould's regiment. His company was organized in Hopkins county, had become tired of the war,

nearly all had deserted and were then leading the heel-flies a merry chase in the Sulphur Bottoms. Although tired of the soldiers life, he was too proud to desert and would stay in the army as long as his command stayed where there was no fighting to do, but if ordered east for desperate service he would hit the breeze for Mexico. Others had gone over there and were making five dollars a day, he had been told, and he could go where any other men could go. The Confederacy was busted anyway, and it was only a matter of time when every man could go home. I noted down in memory every word Mr. Harper said and carefully sizing him up, I decided that he was a man I could trust and at the proper time I would apply the test. After breakfast Mr. McDonald called me away under the pretext of showing me a horse which he proposed to trade for mine. This gave him opportunity to talk to me privately and he again assured me of my welcome to his home and his protection so far as it extended, adding that even if I was found under his shelter, the heel flies dare not molest him, he knew too much and they knew that he knew. He had opposed the war and if Texas had listened to Sam Houston, or if the people had obtained an honest count of the vote against secession she would have no part nor lot in this unnatural war, but like all the rest he was in for it, and had to make the best of it. He had advised his son to stay out of the army, but like other young men, he was driven by an insane impulse to be a soldier, and to go out and fight for his country, when he hadn't lost any country, and now he had a surfeit of military glory. His next son, like all boys of his age, was forced to enlist in the Home Guards or else go to Mexico. Being only a boy he could not consent to his going across the Rio Grande so long as he was allowed to remain with the Home Guards on duty near home. He despised the name "Home Guard;" they were a shame and a crying disgrace to the state and were dreaded by the people they were supposed to protect ten times more than the Yankees. Held back by parental admonitions and a natural disposition to deal honorably his son had never engaged in any of the excesses that had made the heel-flies a stench in the nostrils of all decent men, he, too, abhorred them, and only the force of circumstances



held him to the service. I could rely upon his son, since not one of the McDonalds had ever been known to betray anyone who had broken bread at their table. He further stated that a number of his neighbors, men who had been in the army and had come home on furlough and had refused to return to their commands on account of the hardships of army life and the hopelessness of the Southern cause, had been listed as deserters and had been chased by the Home Guards into the Somers thickets on the Lavaca; that they were determined men, well armed, and would never surrender to any force sent against them. He seemed to be in touch with those men when he said they would try to make their way into Mexico at the proper time. He advised me to stay close about the place, that he would instruct Henry as to what to say in the event he was questioned by any of his company, but for me to keep my eye on that fellow Harper. He was a regular and was not to be trusted too far. "Get all you can and keep all you get in the way of information and give as little as you can in return," was his closing admonition. The day seemed long, though in some respects pleasantly spent in the society of those worthy young ladies whom I learned to know as Lueretia and Lizzie. Mr. Harper left early and came back that evening with a comrade. It was plain that they came to see the girls and cared nothing for my presence. Henry McDonald went to his company in the afternoon. That night after supper and while the two Confederates were being entertained by the girls, Mr. McDonald related to me the troubles of Joe Tate and others in the settlement. Tate had enlisted in the Confederate army and while his regiment was stationed on the Brazos he was tried by court-martial and sentenced to be shot. The night preceding the day set for the execution of the sentence, Joe was being guarded on the east bank of the river. The guards had fish for supper and shortly after having finished the meal it was discovered that there was no water in camp and all were thirsty after having eaten heartily of the fish. Not being fitted with manacles, Joe volunteered to bring the water, which was but a few steps down the bank. No one objected and when he reached the margin of the river he plunged in and by diving and swimming he reached the

opposite shore and escaped into the brush. Several volleys were fired toward him by his guards and a great outcry was raised, but Joe did not believe the shots were fired with any evil intent. He traveled several miles that night and concealed himself during the day. When he reached the Colorado several miles below Columbus he secured a mount from friends and, traveling at night, made his way into the settlement on Clark's Creek near his home, where he learned that the heel-flies had preceded him and were guarding the premises, expecting Joe to be so foolhardy as to walk into their trap. He was heavily armed by this time, and sent word by one of the Hogan boys notifying the officer in command of the company on duty that he was in the country and would remain, as he would never be taken alive. Crit Gollihar, Mr. McDonald said, was another "bad man" in the brush. He, too, had served in the army, and had been wounded at Shiloh and honorably discharged on account of disability. He had subsequently served in the Home Guards until ordered east and on his refusal to obey this order he was arrested and placed in the guard house at Hallettsville. With the aid of friends he escaped and was now with others in the Somers' Thicket. He mentioned others of his neighbors who had passed through similar experiences, most of whom were in the brush on the Somers League. He thought there were at least 20 or 30 men in that wilderness. They were well armed and mounted, thoroughly organized, and had a code of signals that were so well understood that the enemy could never surprise them. There were plenty of cattle in those extensive glades and thickets and there was no dearth of salt and bread as the latter was carried to them by friends. He repeated his regrets that his son belonged to such a disreputable body as the heel-flies, but the boy would never harm anyone, as he had often heard him say he would not shoot to hit a man who was trying to keep out of the Confederate army. He further stated that were he risks not so great he would be glad if Henry could go with me to Mexico and he believed a little persuasion on my part would induce the young man to go. I told him I could not think of such a procedure; that I would not attempt to persuade anyone away unless it be



those who, like myself, were being hunted and chased from pillow to post. While thus talking—it must have been nine o'clock or later—six men rode up to the gate and hallooed. It was very dark and I moved to the rear in the direction of the horse lot, while Mr. McDonald went to the gate. He was asked if Mr. Harper was there and when told that he was, he was called out and two of the men took him aside and engaged for a few minutes in low conversation, after which the six men rode away and Mr. Harper came back and told Mr. McDonald that these men were a part of his command and were looking for Tate; that they had asked him if he had been there that evening. Shortly after this Mr. Harper and his comrade took their leave and when well away Lizzie said to me: "Those men were here for no good. They were on the lookout for Joe Tate and they had too many questions to ask about you. They were spies, and I would advise you to hit the Somers' Thicket before daylight." "Yes," said I, "but I know no one there and I might be taken for a heel-fly and shot." "I hear someone coming now; step out in the darkness," said the girl.

A horseman approached and it proved to be Henry McDonald. They had orders to leave at once and go to Columbus to take the place of the company which had been stationed there, but was now enroute to Hallettsville. A portion of that company had been cleaning up the Navidad country as far down as General Whitfield's place and had reached the Lavaca that evening with two prisoners and were camped at Zumwalt's. The Victoria Home Guards and a squad from Clinton would arrive tomorrow or the day following and when all these got together they were going to clean out the Somers Thickets and kill or capture every man found in that wilderness. He was glad his company was ordered away. He did not want to disobey orders, but he'd be the last man to fire on those men who were being hounded off the earth.

All this conversation took place while sitting on the front gallery and I paid closest attention to every word that was said. The old folks retired, Henry went in to the supper the girls spread for him and when seated at the table the young ladies both came out to where I was and Lucretia, the eldest said: "We

have a plan for you. If you stay here the heel-flies will get you sure. You are as welcome as a brother, but we'd hate to see you caught by the heel-flies. The country is full of them, but with all their brag and bluster, they are not going very far into the Somers League thicket. You must get with those men in the thicket. Don't know any of them? We'll arrange that. We'll have you out of here by the time it is light. Jesse knows the paths; he's been there before. You go right by Doc Bellan's and we'll send Jesse along to get medicine of the doctor. When you get that far and find the way clear he can go with you down on the League. He'll find the boys and then you are safe."

"What of my Mexican and the mules in case they should come?"

"I've no faith in a Mexican; I hate the whole generation, and I don't think you'll ever see your Mexican or those mules. But if they come we will send you word as soon as possible."

"What will Henry say?"

"Don't worry about Henry. You can rest assured that he will not betray you under any circumstances. I had ten times rather see him go to that thicket than go away from home with that gang of heel-fles he is now mixed up with. They are a set of thieves and have been a curse here at home, and when taken to Columbus there's no telling what devilment they will do where they are not acquainted."

When I retired for the night my mind was ill at ease. Dangers were thickening around me and my reflections were such as would not induce sleep. The Columbus heel-flies—my old friends, the enemy—had rounded up the Navidad, caught two men, and were camped at Zumwalt's, only three miles distant. Could it be that those men were Gollihar and Clampit? The Victoria gang were coming up from the south and the Clinton contingent were approaching from the west, while the company from the Brazos, which had come for Joe Tate, was camped on the creek near by. The prospect was indeed gloomy, but where there is a will there is a way; I had the will and I believed the young lady had pointed out the way.

Before dawn Jesse McDonald and I were on the road leading to Dr. Bellah's which was about three miles distant. The boy was a bright lad and told me he

knew the Somers League quite well and that during the past few months he had carried messages, and even provisions, to those thickets. As we rode on I discovered that he carried a cow bell in his morral, which was suspended to his saddle horn, and when asked what he was going to do with that bell he merely remarked, "Wait and see." We halted at Dr. Bellah's and the boy went in to get the medicine. When he came out the doctor accompanied him to the gate, and while we were talking with him, four mounted men came riding out of a copse of timber near by. They were within pistol shot when discovered and advanced at a gallop. I knew I could outrun them, but decided to stay and take chances. When they drew up at the gate they began questioning the doctor in a way that showed at once that they were strangers and not acquainted with the lay of the country. To make bold, I asked: "To what company do you belong, gentlemen?" "Company K, Gould's regiment. Where do you belong?" came the quick response. "I belong to Richardson's company. We have been on duty at Corpus Christi and King's ranch, but we were ordered here to clean out the Somers Thicket, and as soon as the Victoria and Columbus boys arrive, we are going to have a general round-up."

"Where is your company?"

"My company has not yet arrived but will be here this evening. Having been raised near here and knowing the country, quite well, the captain gave me and one of the boys in the company permission to come on ahead, and having nothing else to do, I thought I would do a little scouting on my own hook before the boys got in. Have you gentlemen scouted over near the League?"

"No," said the man who seemed to be the spokesman, "we haven't scouted very much. We guarded the crossing at Mayo's Mill last night expecting to capture Tate, whom we are anxious to catch. We suppose, however, he is with a lot of others in the Somers Thickets, and I guess we will all be with you boys in the big round-up." After some further conversation, from which I learned they were on their return to camp on Clark's creek, they rode away, greatly to my relief. They were not ignorant of the approach of the men from Concrete, Clinton and Victoria, and my story sounded plausible enough. Mr.

McDonald had told me that Dr. Bellah was all right and I did not hesitate to lie to those fellows in his presence. When this quartette of Company K disappeared, the boy and I headed for Somers Thickets.

It must be remembered that a league of land covers a considerable extent of territory, and this Somers League extended quite a distance along the Lavaca river. The densest thickets—more properly forests—were in the river bottom and consisted of various growths, the live oak predominating. From the trees the long moss hung in great festoons and in places the vegetation overhead was so dense that the sun scarcely penetrated to the earth.

When we entered the thickets proper, the boy halted, dismounted, and attached the bell he had brought along to his horse's neck, remounted, and we rode forward. In reply to my inquiry he said, "This is my signal." After winding around through glade and jungle for probably three-fourths of a mile, and while in the act of emerging from a thicket into an open space, a man on foot confronted us and sang out: "Hello, Jess, whar ye going? Who's this feller you've got with ye?" With this the lad introduced me to Mr. Colbath, who was soon informed that I was all right and mighty anxious to keep out of reach of the heel-flies. Mr. Colbath led the way to the lair, where we found ten or twelve men, and a harder looking set I never beheld. I had heard of Italian brigands, English highwaymen, robbers, pirates, and Mexican bandits, but never in fancy had I depicted such a ferocious looking group as that which gathered around me. They were in a rude camp and "shooting irons" were visible all around. They plied me with many questions and when I told them from whence I came and of my stampede from Columbus, one of their number broke in with: "Look here, ain't you the chap that stayed all night at Mrs. Davis' a few nights ago when you was a-running from the heel-flies to beat h—l?"

"I guess I'm the man."

"And didn't some fellers comin' 'cross the prairie on hosses in a run scare you out o' the house an' make you jump in the river?"

"Guess I'm the man."

The fellow then proceeded with extreme merriment to relate the circumstances, adding to and enlarging upon



every ludicrous feature of the event, which caused rounds of laughter. Then turning to me he said: "The lady you stayed with is my sister. I am Wiley Clampit, and I am one of the fellers that scared you so bad that you had to jump in the Navidad and sit out thar in the bottom with the owls until nearly day." To the crowd he said: "Boys, this fellow is all right. My sister told me all about him and if it hadn't been for him I would not be here."

Shortly after reaching my new friends, Jesse McDonald started on his return homeward, well posted as to how to proceed in case my Mexican and the mules showed up.

I soon found these men were continually on the alert. Their ears were open to hear every signal and their scouts and watchmen were on duty at all hours. Several came in during the forenoon and others went out to "look around." All had many questions to ask about Mexico and a majority expressed their determination to go across the Rio Grande if they could once get headed that way.

In the afternoon Crit and Charley Gollihar and several others came in. Charley Gollihar was one of those who had escaped from the guard house at Columbus and seemed very much pleased to see me. Crit Gollihar was a giant in size and evidently a man of great courage. He said to us as we gathered around to learn the news: "Well, boys, thunder's to pay. Oma (his wife) was up at old man Heath's this morning and Dick told her that the Victoria company and a company from over about Clinton was to be here today. The company from Columbus was at Dr. Ponton's this morning; they camped at Zumwalt's last night. Those fellows who came here after Joe Tate are going to stay until all these other companies come up, then they are going to come in here and clean out everything from a bat to a steer. That's what they say they are going to do; but doin' it! You fellers want to keep awake; there's no tellin' what's going to happen; we may have to fight like blazes, but they'll have to fetch along something better than heel-flies if they ever clean up this crowd."

I was anxious to meet Joe Tate, and was told that he was on the lookout, but would probably show up that evening.

At nightfall the company dispersed in squads of six to ten. During the evening

the place of bivouac had been selected for each group or squad. These bivouacs were on the outer edge of an area in circular form, and it was understood that in case of attack during the night all should rally to a common center. The distance between each of the bivouacs was not over 100 yards. Those who had been scouting during the day were allowed to rest and give their horses a chance to graze in one of the nearby open spaces. Besides two or three who were on picket duty quite a distance from "headquarters," each squad kept a man posted to watch over camp and arouse the sleepers in case he heard a signal of danger. Horses that had grazed during the day were brought up, saddled and secured. No fire was allowed, and in order to light his pipe the smoker had to use the flint and steel which every man carried in those days, as matches could not be procured.

The night passed without incident, and at an early hour the next morning one of the outer pickets reported that the Columbus company had encamped that night at the Mayo's Mill crossing, which was not over a mile and a half above us on the river. This news made me doubly uneasy. I was expecting Ciriaco and the Cox boy hourly. They had been directed to cross the Lavaca at Mayo's, and now in all likelihood they would fall into the hands of the enemy. To warn them of their danger was out of the question, and all I could do was to hope for the best.

After having breakfasted, Crit Gollihar called the men together and explained that scouting parties would likely scour the country adjacent during the day and he declared that he was going to do some scouting himself. He wanted five men, well mounted and well armed, to go with him. He chose his brother, Charlie, Mr. Hill, Mr. Clampit, Mr. Colbath, and another whose name I have forgotten. When these had been gone three or four hours, one of the outer pickets came rushing in with a boy by the name of Stamps, who had been sent post haste to notify Mr. Gollihar that a captain and three of his men had been at his house that morning, and after making a search of the premises and offering many indignities, had forced Mrs. Gollihar and her children to prepare breakfast for them. They had demanded fried chicken, and when she refused to kill her fowls for the hungry thieves,



they killed them, dressed them, and swore if she did not cook them as directed they would burn the house. Mrs. Gollihar had sent the boy, thinking he would find her husband in camp. The boy said the men had left but they would be back for dinner and she wanted protection. When we heard this every man made tracks for his horse and in an incredibly short time all were mounted and ready to respond to the lady's call for help. Every man present wanted to go, but it was decided best for some to remain and allow only five to go, as they would be more than a match for four cowardly heel-flies who would insult and rob a helpless woman and her little children.

We had not gone more than half a mile when we heard signal guns off to our right, and these were offered by the boys we had left behind. Thinking that these signals boded danger, and not knowing their full import, we retraced our steps as fast as the jungle would permit. When we reached camp the men were mounted and ready for any emergency. They, like the rest of us, didn't exactly understand the signal; it was not one of alarm, nor was it a signal for help. While discussing the matter we heard a whoop nearby, and Henry Dunn said: "I know that yell it's Crit Gollihar, and he's got good news of some sort. I know him too well." A minute later the cavalcade entered the small glade where we were assembled, and instead of six men there were ten, and four of these wore handcuffs and were securely tied to their saddles. Gollihar and his five men had ambushed them, gotten the drop on them and captured the scoundrels who had forced Mrs. Gollihar that morning to prepare their breakfast. Loud jeers and merriment followed their arrival for a few minutes, and none joined more heartily than I when I saw that one of the captives was one of my former captors at Columbus, and another was no less a person than my friend, Captain Baker of the Columbus Home Guards!

The captured heel-flies were dismounted and placed under a strong guard. After leaving camp that morning, Mr. Gollihar and his squad had gone out on the uplands west of us where the country was more open and where here and there was found a small prairie. While passing through a thicket and just before coming out in the open, they saw four horsemen approaching at a quick

gait. They at once spotted them as heel flies, but thought at first they were of the Hallettsville crowd. They quickly dismounted and secured their horses under concealment and when the four heel flies reached the edge of the thicket they suddenly found themselves covered with over half a dozen revolvers—some of the men carried two sixshooters—and a sharp order, "hands up!" And thus, the capture of the captian and his squad was effected.

When Gollihar was told of our start to his home and the causes leading thereto, he gave way to a paroxysm of uncontrollable rage. The Stamp boy had returned with us and having seen the freebooters at Mrs. Gollihar's that morning, readily identified these captives as being the culprits.

Gollihar was prevented from inflicting any personal injury on these unfortunate men, but soon mounted and rode away in the direction of his home, swearing that he was going to investigate and if they had harmed his family or had committed any serious outrage all hell couldn't bar his vengeance.

When Mr. Gollihar had gone and the excitement had somewhat subsided our prisoners became more communicative. The captian, however, was neverous and when he asked what we were going to do with him and his three men, he was told to wait until Gollihar's return and then in all likelihood they would be hung to a live oak limb. After this he became sullen and had little to say, but one of his men—a red-faced young fellow—who had assisted in my capture at the mule train, seemed to take a philosophic view of matters and his remarks now and then created considerable merriment. He said to me: "Well, young feller, I had you and now you've got me. But I must say, you are the smartest scholar I ever saw. A week ago you couldn't speak a word of English; now you can talk it like a school marm."

The only attempt at levity the captian was known to make during the evening was while I was momentarily absent, someone asked as to my whereabouts, to which the captian dryly replied: "Gone to get his witnesses, I guess." Clampit overhearing the remark responded by saying: "Perhaps so, but he may be leading some more of your men into a bog."

The little captian begged that his handcuffs be removed. He pleaded that

he was an officer in the Confederate service, faithfully performing the duties assigned him, that he was in the discharge of duty when unlawfully arrested, that his captors were an unorganized body of men, whom the authorities could not regard in any other light than citizens in open rebellion against the government and that if those irons were not removed and he and his three men set at liberty, his captors and all concerned in his capture and retention would be treated as pirates when captured and that their escape was an utter impossibility.

It is well to state here that when taken, these four men carried six pairs of hand cuffs—manacles, made of old horse shoes as the nail imprints could be plainly seen in the wristlets. These cuffs were connected by sections of old trace chains, and were home-made, and evidently the product of a very inferior blacksmith. Later we found that every man in that Columbus gang was supplied with a pair of these implements of torture. In reply to the captain's appeal for clemency, he was asked if he was in the discharge of his duty when he and his men were destroying the private property of helpless citizens, killing a poor woman's chickens and forcing her to cook and serve them up for him and those under his command. He was asked if he thought he was discharging the duty of a brave, humane officer by carrying a supply of handcuffs along with which to iron those unfortunates who chanced to fall into his hands. He replied to this latter question by saying that he was only obeying orders when he brought those handcuffs along and that he had never yet placed a man in irons by order or otherwise. When he said this, I and Mr. Clampit were each ready with a reply, I said, "Captain, I saw a man wearing a ball and chain in your office at Columbus. Did you not order that man shackled?" He shook his head, but before he could speak, Mr. Clampit said: "Don't deny it captain; I was there and know what I am talking about; you won't tell me you did not order that man ironed and more than that; it was you or the men under you, who arrested Aaron Shields, a disabled discharged Confederate soldier who had gone to town for the doctor to attend his sick child, and while there you arrested and hurried him off to Houston. His child died while he was

still wearing the irons you had fastened on his wrists, and he may be wearing them yet, if living. No, no, Captain! Those jewels fit you; you've made other men, either of whom were a thousand times a better, a braver man than you ever was, to wear irons by your order, and now you shall wear them for awhile at any rate. You are not altogether a stranger in these parts; several of us know of your cruelty and devilment and there may yet be a gander-pulling before this thing is settled."

A little later in the evening toward the close of the day, a signal was heard by those in camp and was answered by one of the outer guards. Shortly after Mr. Gollihar and others, accompanied by Joe Tate and younger brother, Bob Tate, came into camp. Mr. Gollihar's rage seemed to have subsided since he learned that the worst damage the prisoners had wrought was the killing of his wife's chickens. I took him aside and asked him what he was going to do with those men. He informed me that on Joe Tate's account they were going to hold them, to use his expression, "till h—l freezes over," and if the authorities captured Joe, he would propose an exchange of prisoners and if they refused and ever fired on or hurt any of us, then he would hang a prisoner for every one of our men hurt or killed.

I saw the desperate straits to which these men were reduced, and under the leadership of Crit Gollihar I could only see disaster. The odds against us were too great. A number, some eight or ten of these men had expressed a willingness to go with me into Mexico, where I had once gone to avoid the raising of my hand against my countrymen. I regarded blood shed in and around that Somers Thicket as being a foregone conclusion. My mission to the Colorado was peaceable, I was violating no statutory law, and I could not—would not—consent to be led into a battle with those men who, while bent on my capture or destruction, yet they, too, were my countrymen. These were my reflections and I quickly decided that my own personal safety was worth more to me just then than a whole caballada of big American mules. I would await the coming of Ciriaco and that span of mules two days longer; by that time there would be developments, and if matters grew worse and my Mexican still refused to show up, the mules could go to the devil and I'd go to Mex-



ico. I had asked one of the men—the red-faced fellow—about Lieutenant Cox and was informed that he was sent home from the Navidad with an attack of illness which threatened to develop into pneumonia. This affliction might cause the lady to delay the sending of those mules and Ciriaco, after all, may have decided that there were other routes leading to the Rio Grande.

After supper Joe and Bob Tate and Henry Dunn went off in the direction of Zumwalt's up the river, saying they would be back next day. Crit Gollihar, his brother, Charlie, and two others went to Gollihar's place to keep watch, as they expected the heel flies who, finding their captain and his three men had failed to show up, might make an attack on the house during the night. When the guards were set and horses secured, those left in camp gathered around and we discussed the situation. Everyone present wanted to get out of the scrape without having to fight their way out. They said Gollihar, Joe Tate and Colbath would never leave; that they were determined to stay and bushwhack the heel flies to the bitter end. But while those present were anxious to go with me, yet a sense of dread, really a want of confidence in themselves, was evident. How could we avoid the heel flies at Clinton, Goliad, Beeville, San Patricio, and King's Ranch? All these places lay on our route. And above all, how would we escape capture by the numerous river guards which were at every crossing between Eagle Pass and the mouth of the Rio Grande? I explained that with fifteen or twenty determined men, well armed, and well mounted, I could stand off any body of heel flies we might chance to meet. I had heard a French officer in Monterey during a riot, say that "mobs won't fight, and neither will untrained, undisciplined boys fight." I pointed out that the Clinton company of heel flies were supposed to be in our vicinity, and that even if the town were strongly garrisoned, we could avoid its close proximity by crossing the Guadalupe far below; that we could easily reach that river in less than one night's travel, remain in concealment during the day and the next night reach the San Antonio river below Goliad, which once passed, all danger would be over. As to crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico, I assured them that would be about the easiest task encountered during the

entire journey. Benivede's regiment was on duty, scattered all along the river from Brownsville to Laredo. They were all Mexicans and were the most arrant knaves that ever disgraced a uniform. They drew their pay \$16 per month, in specie. For rations, they had flour, corn meal, fresh beef or mutton every day, besides sugar and coffee. They laid tribute on every bale of cotton that went across the river, and on every article of merchandise that crossed into Texas. Thousands of cattle whose owners were in the Confederate army, roamed the plains from the Nueces to the Rio Grande and when these soldier-pelados wanted to break a Camargo Monte bank, or their monthly stipend began to run short, they would round up a few thousand beeves, drive them to Monterey or Saltillo and sell them—all in the name and by the authority as they claimed, of the C. S. A. Government. The people of Mexico are as honorable and as patriotic as those of any nation on the globe, but the frontier, the border line between two nations is always the resort of the toughest elements of the two countries adjacents, and Benivede's regiment seemed to have become the dragnet that caught the worst that Mexico had to spare.

"No boys," said I, "the clink of a dollar or two will remove all obstacles that may offer on the east bank of the Bravo."

I further told these men my plans for leaving as soon as possible; that I would persuade no man to go with me, but that all who intended going with me must be ready to start the next night or the night following. And furthermore that each must agree to act the man from start to finish. Supplies, we might require along the route, must be paid for, no one's rights violated or property molested. Cattle were plentiful and cheap in those days and it was customary for travelers, stockmen, or others, when in need of food, to kill a maverick (an unbranded yearling), and appropriate its flesh. This I told the men we would do, as was the custom, but in all other matters involving the rights of property, the strictest decorum should be observed. To this proposition each man present expressed his heartiest endorsement and I began to realize from that moment that, however coarse the exterior of these rude, uncouth men, at heart they were honest, and this good



opinion, then formative state, was fully confirmed by subsequent experience.

It was late that night when I stretched out on my blanket for a few hours sleep. My horse stood near, saddled and ready for service. I had determined to brave all lurking dangers and go over to Mr. McDonald's and, if possible learn something of Ciriaco and those mules. I instructed the guards to call me at 3 o'clock in the morning. The distance to be traveled was not over six miles and my aim was to reach Mr. McDonald's before daylight. After a refreshing sleep I was awakened, mounted and set off.

I reached Mr. McDonald's before day and rode to the back of his field north of the house and tied my horse in a thicket. It was yet dark, and on foot I made my way through the field to the horse lot where I found several saddle horses. When I discovered these I concluded that all was not well. In a little house used for storing corn and feed, I found three or four saddles and saddle blankets. These latter were still wet with the sweat of the previous day's hard riding. Had there been only two saddles I would have formed the conclusion that they were the saddles belonging to Ciriaco and the Cox boy and would doubtless have been caught, but the number of saddles was clearly indicative of danger. Members of the household were astir and I withdrew.

About 200 yards east of the McDonald residence was a cabin occupied by an old negro and family, who cultivated a portion of Mr. McDonald's land. While pondering as to what to do next, I noticed a light emanating from this old negro's cabin. I decided to try to learn something from the old ducky. As I stealthily approached the cabin I heard him at the lot in the rear of his domicile feeding the horses. I got between him and his cabin and as he started back to the house after having fed his stock I came up close and in a low voice, I said: "Good morning, Uncle, have you seen any heel flies around here lately?" "Who is you, an' wha' you foolin' heah fo' dis time o' night?" "Don't you know me, Uncle? I am the man you saw at Mr. McDonald's the other day; the man who had your folks do some washing."

"Shuah! Is dat you? Well you's all rite while it's dark, but ef you's trying to keep out a de way o' dem heel flyses

you'd bettah be makin' de sand fly. Dey's a big gang on 'em at Marse A. B's an' dey's sho' mad. Wha' fo' you come heah anyhow?"

"All right, Uncle, you go right in the house, but say nothing to any of your folks; get a bucket as if going for water then go to the well (which was near the kitchen in Mr. Mc's yard) and loiter there until you can get a chance to speak privately to either one of the girls and then tell her that Mr. Garcia is at your gate and wants to see her.

"Lawd, yas sah, yas sah; I'll hab dat gal heah in two minits!"

The first gray streaks of dawn began to appear and minutes seemed hours, but presently I heard the trip of light footsteps and through the slowly vanishing darkness I saw the figure of a woman approaching. It was Lizzie McDonald, and she brought me the most startling news. On account of the growing light she had to be brief; there was no time for an exchange of simple greetings. The men at the house were a part of the Clinton company, who had been scouting around in the direction of the Somers thicket the day before; the men camped at Mayo's Mill captured a Mexican with two mules and a horse and she just knew it was my Mexican and my mules. She did not know where they had taken him, but thought he was held at their camp. The Victoria company had camped the night before at Mr. Hayne's place, on Brushy, Jesse had gone during the night to warn me and tell me about the capture of the Mexican, and she wondered why he had not found me, as he had ample time to reach our lair before midnight. "But it is getting light and they'll miss me at the house. Go quick; don't go through the field, they might see you. Go round the field and for Heaven's sake, don't let them arrest you." And with that she was gone and turning to the old negro who had returned shortly after the young lady's appearance, I handed him a dollar, and again admonished him to observe secrecy, I turned to leave when he said, "Wait Mahstah; de old 'oman's cookin' brekfus, an' de braid is neahly done, an' I'se gwine guv yo' a big pone o' dat braid ef yo' can jis wait a minit. It won't tuk yo' long an, yo's gwine to git mighty hongry a runnin' fum dem heel flyses an' doin' widout yo' brekfus."

(To be continued.)

I had neither time nor appetite just then, and handing the generous hearted old negro another dollar, I hastened around the field through the brush, mounted and was away in the direction of the Somers League. I did not seek to avoid any one, as it was quite early and the heel flies were never known to be early risers, unless there was loot to be had without fighting. For the 'steenth time since leaving Matamoras, I was mad. Ciriaco was a prisoner in the hands of those measley scape goats, and, besides, they had those mules. I would have those mules if it took all spring and summer too, and if they harmed poor Ciriaco I would stay with those men in the thickets till the close of the war.

The sun was up shining bright and clear, a typical South Texas spring morning when I reached Dr. Bellah's, I made no halt and had gone a short distance when I saw a body of horsemen coming from the direction of Mayo's Mill. That part of the country was open post-oak woods and seeing me at about the same time I discovered them coming toward me, they raised a whoop and dashed forward at full speed. Veering to the right, I "lit out" and the race began. They chased me more than a mile and at no time were they nearer than 300 yards, but from the start they kept up a running fire as if they expected to hit someone. I reached cover in the edge of the thicket and they withdrew, fearing as the boys afterward said, an ambuscade.

Signals had been sounded at different points along the thickets when this firing was heard and I met a force hastening to learn the cause. I told the boys that it was only a little race for morning exercise and that no heel fly could get near enough to shoot me so long as I was better mounted than they. "Fellers they 'll never catch 'im as long as they is deep water about. He was a headin' for the river an' the Lavaca's no bigger nor the Navidad." This speech came from big nose, gander-eyed Wylie Clampit, and there was a loud guffaw at my expense.


When we reached camp I related to the boys all I had heard and told them of my determination to rescue my Mexican at all hazards and asked them if they would stay by me in the undertaking. all

agreed to go with me, if there were any fighting to do they would not desert me. It was agreed however, to wait until the Gollihar boys, the Tate' and Colbath came in and then our attacking force would be larger. Five new men had come in the early morning but no one seemed to know much about them, more than they had been chased away from home by the heel flies and were considered reliable. The Colorado company that had captured my Mexican numbered only thirty men and boys, mostly the latter; four of these were under guard in our camp, leaving the enemy only about 26 and it was conceded that a dozen determined men could capture the entire lay-out.

Shortly after noon, the two Gollihar boys, the Tate boys, Henery Dunn and Mr. Colbath came in, bringing with them a man by the name of Jennings, who said that his father lived a few miles below on the east side of the Lavaca river. He was well known to nearly all in camp and had been kept in the brush by the heel flies nearly all winter.

I related my late experience to Mr. Gollihar and those who came in with him, told them of the capture of the mules and Ciriaco by the heel flies, and of my determination to attack the camp of the enemy and that the boys had agreed to join me in the undertaking. Gollihar was pleased with the idea and announced his willingness to lead the expedition. He swore that he alone could whip half of that outfit and that since they had gone into the mule business he proposed to become a horse dealer and that some of those heel flies had some mighty good horses which he stood greatly in need of just then. We would make the attack that evening about four o'clock.

This proposition was heartily approved by all except Joe Tate. He reasoned along different and more practical lines. He set forth that there were other means at hand by which to accomplish the ends in view; that of rescuing the young Mexican, and the mules. He said to, openly or stealthily attack those men would involve us in greater embarrassments than those under which we now labored, that it would be making war on the Confederate forces and that if captured at any subsequent period, we would be courtmar-

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tialed and hanged. "My plan," continued Mr. Tate, is this: "We hold four of their men as prisoners—a captain and three privates. They are a burden to us and we ought to get them off our hands. Release one of these privates right away, and send him their camp with a proposal to exchange the captain for this young man's Mexican, and the two privates for the mules—mule for mule—they'll be glad to swap as doubtless, they know nothing as to what may have befallen these men."

After some further discussion Mr. Tate's plan was agreed to. Of course these deliberations were held at some distance from and beyond the hearing of the prisoners.

During this general discussion, Jennings heard me mention the Cox boy in connection with the capture of the Mexican and the mules and when an agreement was reached and our plans formulated he told me he knew the Cox's and the two families were great friends and that the boy was safe. He said he had left his father's ranch only that morning on his return to Columbus. He further stated that it was daylight when he and the Mexican neared the Lavaca river, and he begged the Mexican to run down the prairie and stop at Mr. Jennings until night, then make their way to Clarks Creek settlement. The Mexican assured him that he could not make it safely through and as they had ridden all night and he (a boy), being almost exhausted from fatigue, he could go to Mr. Jennings, rest up, and return home at his pleasure. The boy followed the suggestion and was there safe. While the Mexican went on and was captured. More on Mrs. Cox's account, than any other, I was greatly relieved on receipt of this intelligence.

Our plan, as finally agreed upon for the evening, was this: Every man was to be in readiness to start at 3 p. m. By that time those on watch along the outer borders of the thicket would be in for evening relief.

The prisoners were to be blindfolded, mounted and their horses were to be led by men detailed for duty. We were to ride in silence to a point in the river bottom a quarter of a mile from camp at the Mayo Mill—a point where we would be concealed from view by a dense thicket. From this thicket we were to send in to the enemy our demand, and if this was

refused we would tie our prisoners to a tree and charge the camp.

There was a bountiful supply of fresh beef in camp and the men during the forenoon had barbequed a quantity of the choicest pieces. After a hearty feasting on beef without bread, I called the boys together and told them that if our raid on the heel fly camp proved successful I was going to leave next night and all who wished to go with me to Mexico must be ready. Nineteen declared their readiness to accompany me and to face any perils that might beset our way. The Gollihar boys, the Tate brothers, Dunn and Colbath said they had no desire to leave the country, and that they believed when the heel flies found out that so many had gone in a body they would abandon the chase, and this would give them more freedom to go where they pleased.

Half an hour before we were ready to start Jesse McDonald came in bringing a sack of corn bread, some salt and the message the girls had intrusted him with the night before. During the night, he had met a party of heel flies, turned and fled and they chased him to Brushy Creek below the Harless school house, where he gave them the dodge. He then followed a circuitous route and got there with the bread, but it was reduced to the consistency of corn meal.

The lad wanted to go with us against the heel flies, but I and others objected. I told him to get back home before night, if possible, and tell the girls if we were successful, and the way open. I would be at their house that night to tell them good-bye.

At the appointed hour all were in readiness. Four men were detailed to guard the four prisoners—Colbath and Charlie Gollihar being of the number—and each was well coached as to duty. Four strong rawhide ropes were conspicuously displayed by these guards while making preparation to mount the captives. When they proceeded to blindfold them, the captain exclaimed: "Men, in Heaven's name what does this mean?" Colbath replied in a serious and sympathetic tone by saying: "Well, Captain, we have to obey orders; if you have any preparations to make—but, I'm forbidden to talk." It was plainly seen that the poor men were greatly alarmed and I would have gladly given them assurance of their safety but could not under the



circumstances. When we mounted I counted twenty-nine men, not including the prisoners, and two others came to us before getting clear of the lower thickets.

Thirty-one in all, and these by common consent were led by Joe Tate. Through the mazes of those jungles we rode in single file and in silence. When out of the Somers thickets proper, we kept well under cover along the narrow river bottom until we reached the point designated. Here we halted and dismounted. A man was directed to go on foot along the river to a small elevation where he could obtain a very fair view of the enemy's camp. He returned shortly and reported that there were quite a number of horses in the camp, but he could discover only 20, perhaps 25 men, although there might be double that. This report served to change the plan originally agreed upon. Instead of sending one of the captives into camp, Mr. Tate decided upon a defiant, aggressive course. He approached the captain and asked him if he had any writing material. The captain replied that he had a piece of a pencil and a small note book, "Very well; you shall do some writing and it may be your last. It all depends. Here boys some one of you take off the handcuffs, so that he can write."

Mr. Tate beckoned me to draw near so that I might hear all that was dictated. The captain was very nervous but managed to scrawl an order to his men directing them to deliver at once one Ciriacio, a Mexican, and two mules they had taken when the Mexican was captured, that he, the captain, and his three men, (giving their names) were being held by a band of desperadoes, who were determined to hang them if the demands were not immediately complied with. I well remember the closing sentence of that order. "Therefore I command that the said Mexican and mules be delivered at once, and it is stipulated that my release and that of your captive comrades, will follow immediately upon the execution of this order." A man by the name of Bast was selected to carry the message under flag of truce. He was instructed to approach the camp near enough to observe the strength of the enemy, and call for a parley. If he found that their force was about equal or inferior to ours, he was to wave his flag over his head twice. He was also instructed fully as to what to say to the enemy. But there arose

another barrier. There was not a white handkerchief in the whole outfit. There were handkerchiefs, but they were of the bandana brand and color. Someone suggested a shirt, but investigation showed there was not a white shirt in the crowd. Some there were that had once been white but age and usage and lack of soap and water had changed their color. Finally a "poke"—a sort of bread sack that was made of home spun cloth and still retained a resemblance of its original whiteness, was pressed into service, torn open and the cleanest section cut out with a jack-knife and fixed to a long switch. This Mr. Bast took and with its tarnished folds dancing in the evening breeze, rode boldly to a point within close hailing distance of the heel fly camp. Some twenty minutes or more elapsed, when our lookout motioned us to advance. He had seen Bast give the preconcerted signal.

Our party rode out from our place of concealment, leaving two men to guard the prisoners, and when in the open we formed in a line and advanced abreast, allowing a space of about ten paces between the horsemen in order to make our appearance seem as imposing as possible. When within one hundred yards of our truce bearer we halted and maintained strict silence. A man had come out from the camp and was talking with Bast. When our column came in view we could not fail to note that there was excitement in the enemy's camp. This emboldened us and Joe Tate and I advanced and joined Mr. Bast. Seeing this movement, two of the heel flies came out and joined us. Mr. Bast remarked as we rode up: "These fellows say they have the Mexican, but won't give him up until their captain and comrades are produced. Mr. Tate said to the men: (the two extra men had rode up by this time.) "We haven't a minute to fool away with you fellows. Your captain and his three men are in that thicket over there, closely guarded by fifty determined men. We have come after that Mexican and we are going to have him and if there is a shot fired at one of my men your captain and those with him won't last a minute. I've got enough men to bag your whole crowd, and it would do some of them good to quirt every scoundrel in your outfit. Hurry up now, we've no time for nonsense." By this time the company in camp had rallied and formed (on foot)

at the edge of the grove in which they were encamped. Their paucity of number was apparent, and we learned later that a number belonging to their command were absent on a scout looking for Bob Tate.

The spokesman for the heel flies was evidently "bluffed," and began to weaken. He said that being overpowered he would have to yield, but he first wanted to know that the captain was alive and safe, and if so, he would surrender the Mexican in exchange. I spoke up and said: "We do not propose giving you all four of these men even for that Mexican. We want a little boot in this trade. You have a pair of mules you seized when you took that Mexican; we want those mules and besides, if you have any other prisoners, we want and are going to have them. Where are those two men you arrested on the Navidad?"

"We have four white men and the Mexican. I don't think you men ought to demand the Mexican. The mules he had belonged to a Mrs. Cox near Columbus; some of our company know the mules, and that Mexican stole them, and we caught him after he had ridden all night and the d—d greaser ought to be hung. We are going to return those mules to the rightful owner."

"All right, sir! We want those mules right now. The Mexican is not a thief he was in my employ, and I intrusted him with those mules and he was on his way to headquarters when you arrested him."

"Say my friend," said Tate: "You are fooling away too much time here," and wheeling toward our men he shouted "C-o-m-p-a-n-y, advance!" The boys came forward in a swinging trot with pistols drawn. Turning to the heel fly Tate said: "Will you bring out those prisoners and those mules?" "Yes I will produce them at once, but captain it looks like it would be fair to bring up our men. We are willin' to do the right thing." Tate then said to one of the boys in a very authoritative, loud tone, "Ride back to the command and ask Captain Gollihar to order a detail of two men and bring those four prisoners forward—those who belong to the Colorado Home Guards."

Hearing this peremptory order, and doubtless believing that he was almost in the grasp of an army of blood-thirsty

desperadoes, the heel fly man hastened back to his company and by the time our men, (detailed by Captain Gollihar, who was all the while in the ranks) arrived, the prisoners held by the heel flies were being brought forward. They were all handcuffed and poor Ciriaco had a woe-begone look until he recognized me in the crowd. When they came up I said, "Where are those mules and this Mexican's horse, saddle and blankets. There's going to be trouble (I here substitute the word trouble. I used a more emphatic word) if those mules and horse are not forthcoming at once." "One of the men who is out on a scout is riding the horse; the mules will be here presently," spoke up one of the heel flies, a lad about my own age and size. I had dismounted and was standing with one hand resting on Ciriaco's shoulder and when the young chap made that statement concerning the horse, every word of which the Mexican understood, he said to me in a low tone: "Mentira, mi caballo y las mullas allistan atados en el bosque cerca del campo." (He lies: My horse and the mules are tied there in the grove near the camp.) Turning on this little heel fly spokesman, I said, "You lie like the miserable thief that you are. This Mexican's horse is tied in that grove with the mules and these dickeringings have to stop right now until that stock and everything this Mexican had when you arrested him is restored." Tate gave force to my remarks by ordering the men to get ready for business. A man older than the young heel fly realizing that matters were about to assume a serious phase, chimed in: "Don't, gentleman, don't be too hasty, the young man is just mistaken. The horse and also the mules will be here in a minute."

From our position we could see some tall hustling about that camp. A bridle here, a saddle blanket, a morral, a rope, a quirt, was fished out there and each article was quickly brought out. Ciriaco said to me, "Estos ladrones me robado de mi pistola y el poco dinero lo que traigo," (Those thieves have stolen my pistol and the little amount of money I brought along.) I mentioned this fact to the spokesman and told him his captain was there to testify that not an article was taken from him or his men during their captivity and that this Mexican's property even to the last farthing had to be restored. At this the



captain confirmed what I had said and ordered that my demands be complied with.

While I was engaged in looking to the delivery of those mules and attending to Ciriaco's interests, Mr. Tate and Mr. Bast were attending to the claims of the other four men whom we had liberated. They also had been robbed and demanded either remuneration or restoration. The horse and saddle of one was, without a doubt, absent and could not be delivered. Several horses were led up and he was ordered by Tate to take his pick, but be careful and not take a better horse than the one he had lost. He chose the best horse, bridle and saddle in the layout, and after the war, I was told that three days later, these same heel flies run him and recaptured him, his horse and equipment. The pony they had first taken from him, it was said was an old plug that could not head a cow. While all this was in progress, I noticed that Ciriaco wore an old dilapidated wool hat, a piece of headgear quite different to that he wore at Columbus, and I asked him if he had been swapping. Pointing to a young chap who was standing in front of the camp, he told me that fellow had his hat, and that it was a forced swap. I stated the facts to the captain, who called the lad by name, and ordered him to bring out that Mexican's hat. He obeyed, and as he approached, Ciriaco seized his own sombrero, a very stylish and costly affair, and threw the old hat on the ground, stamped upon it and kicked it away. The young heel fly picked it up and sheepishly slunk off. All demands being met, cuffs were removed from our prisoners and they were once more free. Crit Gollihar insisted on keeping the handcuffs, saying that he might have use for them some other time. Joe Tate gave his little captain some wholesome advice before leaving. He told him who he was and assured him that he was going to stay around home, and that no set of heel flies could take him. He told him that he would do well to take his little gang of thieving boys and go home, and allow them to assist the women in making a crop of corn with which to feed the starving soldiers in the army, and closed by warning him that swift vengeance would be visited on him and his outfit if any one in that section was further molested.

By this time the day was far spent, the sun was low in the west, and bidding

the liberated captain and his brave (?) command goodbye we set out on our return to the Somers thickets, having accomplished far more than we expected.

When we reached our lair, we found two of our men, who, being out on watch failed to join us that evening. They reported that the Victoria company was at Wallace's Mill a short distance below, and that several of that outfit evidently had been scouting through the country that day. They knew nothing of the Clinton company or any other layout that might be in that vicinity.

After we appeased our appetites on beef, roasted over the coals, I told the boys that that country wasn't quite large enough to hold me any longer. I thanked them for their generous aid in the release of my Mexican and the recapture of my mules, and the only means by which I could return the favor was to pilot them safely into Mexico, a place where home guards dared not molest and where heel flies confined their operations to old cows in the spring time. Twenty-two in all declared their willingness to go. Some were ready to start then, others were not quite ready; they had to go home and make certain preparation, etc. After much planning and discussion, it was finally agreed that we would postpone our departure until the following night, at which time we would all get together and make the start. As a number of the men lived near the German church, a short distance from where the town of Hope is now situated, it was agreed to meet there for the start at 10 o'clock, and not later than 10:30 p. m. Should for any cause, those arriving find that it would be unsafe to assemble there, then we were to rendezvous about a mile further one, and at the back of the field owned by an honest and inoffensive old German by the name of Hample. Each man was advised to come with three or four days' rations of bread and also a supply of bacon and dried beef, if it could be had, but not to come overburdened with baggage.

The German church was about six miles southwest from Mr. McDonald's and having a night and a day before me, I resolved to go over and tell the folks goodbye. Four of the men announced their willingness to accompany me.

When the sun had gone down, we separated, I and my crowd of six, including myself, rode out near the open woods, where we halted until darkness



overspread the earth. Ciriaco led one of the mules and one of the men, a Mr. Kendrick, led the other, while I rode in advance. When near the Heath place, I halted the men in a copse of timber and rode down to Dr. Bellah's house. The docter was away on a professional call, but his niece, Miss Olivia Chandler, who lived in the family came out and answered my inquiries. (Miss Chandler afterwards married Wm. Gafford. She has a son, J. A. Gafford at Silver Valley, Texas and a daughter, Mrs. Smith living in East San Angelo.) She heard of our affair at Mayo's Mill that evening, and the greatest excitement prevailed throughout the settlements. Men had been passing going in the direction of Mayo's since just before sundown, and they were seemingly in haste. The report had gone out that we had captured the entire Colorado company, carried away all their horses and left the men tied to trees. To avoid meeting with any of these heel flies, she directed me to follow a route different to any I had followed before in going to Mr. McDonald's. This route we pursued, and reached Mr. McDonald's between nine and ten o'clock. Approaching within a quarter of a mile of the house, I concealed my men in the brush near the road, dismounted and went on foot to reconnoiter. I knew I could depend on the old darkey to find out if the way was clear, and cautiously approaching the cabin, I called to him to come out and direct me in the road leading to Mr. Hogan's. In answer to my inquiries he said, in his serio comic way: "Shuah, dem same heel flies is heah yit, only dey's mo' done cum. Dey mus' a got some kind o' news dis even' late, as dey was a pow'ful scatterment 'mong 'em. Ah donno; dey's a big dance ober at Marse Carpenter's and dey mout been done gone to dat dance. Deys' all gone but three, an' dey's stayin' to git de pervishuns what dey wanted cooked. Marse McDonald's wimmin folks is cookin' hard as dey can an, my ole 'oman is cookin' braid to 'em too. Dey said dey wanted dem wittuls (victuals) foah mid-night."

"Is Mr. McDonald there?"

"Yas sah, yes sah. Marse A. B. is dah."

"Well, say, uncle, can't you slip over there and tell the girls I am here again?"

"Cose I kin, but you stay 'way dar in

de dark; dem heel flies mought be camin' down heah to git dat braid."

In a very short time Jesse and one of the girls came. Quite a number of the Clinton company had been there, coming and going all day. That evening a runner came in post haste and brought orders for every man to be at Mayo's Mill by sun up in the morning, and that a combined attack was to be made on the Somers thicket. The men camped at Mrs. Tate's were going to leave that night, so said Mr. Harper, who had left the house not half an hour ago. There was a dance at old man Carpenter's about half a mile distant, and a number of the men were attending the function. Late in the evening and after this runner had left, they had ordered their father, Mr. McDonald, to have a quantity of corn bread cooked by midnight, and they were now performing the unwelcome task. The three men left at the house were of the Clinton gang and were mere boys, and were mad because they, too, could not attend the dance.

I told them of the men I had staked out and that I would be at the house presently with my crowd, and for them to keep quiet as there would be no rucas raised.

Mr. McDonald had plenty of corn and top-fodder, and leading my men round to the lot, we dismounted and fed our stock. We then went into the house and found three heel fly friends in the kitchen, having a gay time talking to the girls while they were cooking. I told these young men that they ought to be with their command at Mayo's mill; that the "brush-busters" had cleaned up the Colorado company that evening and every available man was ordered to assemble at Mayo's by daylight the next morning. In reply to their questions I told them we belonged to the Victoria company and were then en route to the place of rendezvous, and had come by to see if we could get some bread. Certainly. They were having bread cooked and would divide. Mr. McDonald's folks were mighty fine folks and they never turned a poor hungry soldier away empty. Did we come by where the dance was going on? They were nearly dead to go to the dance, but they had been left to attend to the cooking of that bread. One of my men, Mr. Hamersley, suggested that, being tired and not caring for the dance, we would look after

the rations, and they might go to the ball. They were delighted over the proposition and were off in a jiffy, leaving us complete masters of the situation.

When they had gone, Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, Jesse and the girls gathered round us in the kitchen to hear the story of the day's happenings, the three men who had remained in the kitchen with me, went out, saying they preferred being outside on the lookout.

Mr. McDonald showed uneasiness and said those men at the dance were liable to appear any moment and that while entirely welcome, yet, I was by no means safe. He said I was very imprudent and would certainly be taken before I got out of the country if I did not use more caution. He wanted to see those mules that had caused me so much trouble, and I had to go with him to the lot, where, in the dim starlight, after examining them closely, he gravely shook his head and said: "Too good a pair of mules. You'll never get through with 'em." I called Ciriaco and the others and told them to prepare to mount. With Mr. Mc. I went back in the kitchen to bid adieu. Kind good Mrs. McDonald—everybody called her "Aunt Martha"—had a sack of that bread and a small sack of sweet potatoes ready for us to take along. She said we had as well have that bread as the heel flies. One of the girls gave me a woolen neck scarf, another a pair of woolen mits—all their own make.

It was with a feeling of sadness and dread that I turned away from that hospitable home and rode out into the darkness, not knowing what ill or good fortune the future held in store for me.

One of the men with me knew the road leading to the German church, and taking the lead he held a steady gait until, when we had covered four or five miles, we left the road and he piloted us to the home of a Mr. Cherry, whose son had been with us in the thickets, and was of the number who had agreed to go with me to Mexico. Back of Mr. Cherry's field, in a creek bottom, we bivouaced in a thicket, where amid the torments of a swarm of mosquitoes, we remained until the following night. Mr. Cherry was very kind to us and invited me to dine at the table, but I declined, preferring to remain under close cover. When we breakfasted the morning after our arrival at Cherry's I noticed that my four white comrades had a good supply of

bread, and when questioned, they admitted that when they left the kitchen to go on the lookout the night before, they went to the old negro's cabin and told the old darkey that they had come after that bread, and the old slave, thinking they were the heel flies who had ordered the bread, willingly gave it into their hands. I had told them of the cooking arrangements before we approached Mr. McDonald's house.

About an hour after nightfall, with Mr. Cherry's son, Rob, as pilot, we set out for the appointed place of rendezvous, the German Methodist church. When we came in sight of the place, we saw that the house was lighted up, and found, upon inquiry, that it was prayer meeting night. We rode into a wood near the church and dismounted, having decided to wait an hour for our expected recruits. It had been two years since I had attended church, except on a few occasions when, as sightseer, I had attended services in Catholic churches in Mexico. It was with an effort that I repressed the impulse to become one among those humble, devout worshippers. In my early years I had received pious instructions and had been taught to be religious by God-fearing Methodist parents, whose rule was to take the children to the house of God on regular occasions. I withdrew from the men and came near the house. I heard the devout leader of that little meeting offer the opening prayer. He prayed for the poor soldiers in the field, the sick, the hungry, the wounded, and the dying. He prayed for those laboring under affliction and bereavement at home, prayed for the enemy and prayed God to hasten the end of that unholy war. They sung those same old hymns that I had heard and learned when a little child, and their sad, sweet, melody forcibly recalled to mind the days when I was a happy boy in the old home. I was now a waif, a cast-away, a wanderer, and being pursued by relentless men. These latter thoughts disturbed me little, but the melody of those hymns overcame me and I sat down and wept as a child and implored the Father to bestow that merciful protection that He has given me through all these subsequent years.

After waiting about an hour and none of our men appearing we went to the back of the Hample field and found several in waiting. By 10 o'clock we counted noses and there were pre-



sent twenty-one men and two boys. These latter I supposed to be not over 14 years old, and having learned of our plans from some of our men, had run off from hom expecting to go with me to Mexico. I ordered them to go home. About 10:30, the appointed hour, we set forth on our long and perilous journey to the Rio Grande. The sun was an hour high next morning when we crossed the Guadalupe, a mile or so below where Cuero now stands. We remained in the brush along the river bottom all day and at nightfall we mounted and headed for the San Antonio river below Goliad. A young man named Walton knew the country and served as guide. At sunrise we were on the west bank of the San Antonio river, where we found good grass and a snug place of concealment. Our breakfast was not tempting. Dried beef, a few potatoes roasted in the fire, and corn bread which by constant attrition had become a mass of crumbs. Mr. Walton stated that our position was secure, it being an out of the way place, and that the nearest house was nearly a mile distant and that a man named Inman lived there, that he was a Union man and always worked a good number of Mexicans. This piece of information was gratifying indeed, and calling Ciriaco to one side, I directed him to mount and ride over to Mr. Inman's and learn all he could from any Mexicans that he might chance to meet and then come back and report. In an hour's time he was back and stated that two or three Mexican families were on the place, besides la familia del dueno de la hacienda; that there had been no soldiers in that part of the country for several days. Thus finding my way clear, I mounted and went up to the ranch. Miss Inman, the pretty lady interpreter who so generously came to my rescue at Goliad, gave a cordial greeting and expressed a great surprise at seeing me at her home. In the best English I could command, I told her that having occasion to pass through the country toward the Rio Grande and having heard that she lived near, I had called to tender my gratitude for her generous sympathy and the part she played in securing my release from the little captain and his heel flies at Goliad, that I had learned that her father was a Unionist and for that cause was being hounded off the earth by these same Home Guards. She led the way into the sitting room where

I was presented to other members of the family, and I was made to feel once more I was in the house of friends. A Mexican servant put my horse in the lot and fed him well, while I, when the noon hour came, was the guest of honor at a real old-time family feast.

During my stay, I had related some of the events of my trip, and my start back to Mexico and our travels at night instead of day. Miss Inman did not think I would encounter any serious danger until we reached the west bank of the Nueces, and when informed that we would resume our journey at nightfall, she asked that we send a couple of men for provisions, which she would have ready. I gratefully accepted her offer and while preparing to tell her goodbye and be off, Ciriaco advanced from a group of his countrymen and brought forward a Mexican who wanted to go with us.

He was the pelado who had stayed all night with me in the guard house at Goliad! He recognized me at once and with exuberant joy invoked the blessings of all the saints upon my devoted head. All he wanted was an opportunity to show his gratitude for my kindness to him while he was in bonds with not a friend near. Don Ciriaco had told him of the mules. He had no horse, no tengo caballo, but he could ride one of those mules and that would save the trouble of leading it. He would saddle and unsaddle my horse, he would be my mozo. I asked Miss Inman about this man and she said that as no witness appeared against him at Goliad he was released and later found his way to their place. She advised me to watch him in case I let him go along, as she had put him down as bad hombre.

After leave taking of this hospitable family I mounted and saying to the pelado, "I guess you can go with us if it is agreeable with Ciriaco." I set off for our camp. When we reached camp I told Ciriaco that this Mexican whom we nick-named Zarco on account of a glazy blemish in one of his eyes, was to be strictly under his charge; that it was on his solicitations that I had consented to his going with us, and that he would be held responsible for his conduct. Two days had not elapsed when we all regretted having ever seen El Zarco.

When Texas seceded from the Union, the United States troops were withdrawn from all forts along the border



from Red River to the mouth of the Rio Grande, thus leaving exposed to the Indians all the settlements along the frontier. The state inaugurated at once a very wise system of frontier defense, the efficiency of which proved to be far superior to that employed by the federal government after the war.

A well defined line along the border was drawn from Red River to the Gulf. All men subject to military service and who lived beyond or outside of that line were exempt from service in the Confederate army, but were required to organize into companies and one half of each company was required to be on patrol or scout duty all the time. The Medio river, which is about 15 or 20 miles west of Goliad, was said to be on this line at the time of which I write. Beyond, or west of the Medio there were no home guards, such as we had encountered as heel flies, and our only peril lay in the possibility of meeting or falling in with soldiers going to or returning from army posts along the lower Rio Grande.

Leaving the San Antonio river at dark, we rode as far as the Medio, where we dismounted, mounted guard and remained until morning. The next evening late we reached the Nueces, about two miles above San Patricio, only to find the bank full. I was in favor of swimming our horses over, as the stream was narrow, but a majority of the boys were against taking the risk. I argued that it would not be prudent to undertake to cross at the ferry at San Patricio, as there would likely be a number of soldiers there and they might cause us trouble. But I was over-ruled, and to San Patricio we went. As we passed through the little Irish village, we saw very few people, but when we approached the river an animated scene came into view. There were several wagon trains loaded with cotton en route to Brownsville, mule and ox trains, Mexican, German and American. On the opposite bank were camped trains returning from the Rio Grande, laden with government supplies and merchandise. All these with daily additions were waiting for the river to become fordable, as the little ferry boat was too small to bear up the heavy wagons. It was sundown when we rode boldly into this vast encampment with its bright camp fires and incessant din of ox and horse bells and shouts of herdsman. I asked for the ferryman and was told that he had

just gone over with his boat, but would be back in a few minutes. We rode to the water's edge, dismounted and waited for the coming of the boat. El Zarco, our pelado, had ridden one of the mules without saddle since leaving the Inman place, and complained of being muy cansado (very tired) and in great misery. Several gathered round and a few questions were asked as to where we were from and to where bound, etc. We gave evasive replies to these questions, which seemed to be entirely satisfactory. It was about an hour after dark when we all got over, and we rode out about a half mile and camped near a small lake, known as Lago Cayman, or Lake of the Alligator.

We were all greatly fatigued with the day's hard riding, and being, as we thought, beyond the pale of any serious danger, a spirit of security seemed to possess the men. No one wanted to stand guard; it was useless, they contended; we would not be molested and all were too tired and sleepy to keep watch. I insisted, begged and persuaded until they reluctantly yielded. I kept watch the first two hours and it was only by continued walking and moving about and around the horses that I kept awake. Sleep seemed to envelop me as a mantle and several times I came near yielding to its influence. At about 11 o'clock I turned in, after calling Ciriaco to go watch until 12. At 12 o'clock he came in and Wiley Clampit and young Kendrick went out.

I was up at dawn and found Clampit and Kendrick were still out. When it was sufficiently light to see well I discovered that our stock was scattered, and I could see no one on duty. I found Clampit and Kendrick asleep under a huisache bush near the edge of the chaparral. Ciriaco's horse and Clampit's saddle were gone, and El Zarco was nowhere in sight. Ciriaco hastened to the ferry, but no horseman had passed that way. In our search Ciriaco had met up with a Mexican named Feliciano Torres, who told him that the place where we camped was the most noted of any spot on the road from Goliad to King's ranch. Seldom a night passed that some camper was not robbed at Lago Cayman. He said a few miles above was the "Rincon"—a big bend in the river—and this bend was one vast wilderness of chaparral and tanglewood. He stated that this bend afforded a convenient hiding place

for thieves and their stolen stock. This information led to the conclusion that El Zarco had gone to the Rincon, but I ordered out men in twos to scout in five directions. With Ciriaco and others I went to explore the Rincon, leaving the other remaining men to guard camp.

Two miles above Lago Cayman we came to a ranch occupied by a Dr. Cox, a brother to Rev. Ivy H. Cox, a pioneer and Methodist preacher in the West Texas Conference. With the doctor re-resided his son-in-law, Jack Cook, and wife. The ranch they occupied was on the site of Old Fort San Miguel, where a desperate battle was fought and won by the Texans during the Revolution. The ruins of the old fort still remained and overlooked a beautiful lake in the valley below. While at the ranch and just before leaving I noticed a very comely looking young chap who, while clad in citizen's clothing, wore a Federal cavalryman's hat, such as I had seen the First and Second Texas, U. S. A., wear during Banks' occupation of Brownsville. The young man seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts and appeared to shun or rather hold himself aloof from others.

Mr. Cook kindly consented to assist me in the exploration of the Rincon. I had engaged the Mexican, Feliciano, and his brother on account of their knowledge of the Rincon and with these two Ciriaco, Mr. Cook and myself, five in all, we struck out for the big bend. While riding along my mind reverted to the sad-looking stranger I had observed at the ranch, and I asked Mr. Cook if he was a member of the family. "No; that fellow is a prisoner," was his blunt reply.

From the beginning of the blockade until the fall of the Confederacy the Federal's maintained a body of troops on San Padre Island, just out from Corpus Christi. Occasionally the Yankees, finding the way clear, would come across to the mainland, in small parties, well mounted, and round up a bunch of fat cattle for beef. A short while previous to my arrival with my outfit, a squad of these soldiers had landed at Penescas below Corpus and had been captured by Cook and some of his crowd. Instead of paroling these men they decided to hold them, farm them out, and each man to keep his prisoner on the principal of a sort of peonage. There was no chance of escape. It was a long way to the Rio Grande. It was 30 miles to the

nearest point on the coast, Corpus, and the avenues of possible escape were well guarded. This Yankee was being held by a member of Richardson's company who lived just across the river above San Patricio. He was given the liberty of a "trusty" and was permitted to visit Mr. Cook at his pleasure. I decided to liberate that Yankee. The heel flies had accused me of having stolen those mules I would now try to steal a Yankee, if the Yankee was willing.

We had not proceeded far into the Rincon when we heard two shots and a whoop in the direction from whence we came. I understood the signal and we hurried back to learn that Kendrick and Clampit had found a trail where two horses had put into the river and their tracks where they went out on the opposite side were plainly visible. When Ciriaco examined the tracks he declared they were those of his horse. We had no time to lose. Following Mr. Cook's suggestion, two men were to swim the horses over and follow the trail. Two others were to go up on the south side of the river to the old Beeville crossing, cross over and travel down the river until they should meet the two on their way up the river. Owing to the great bend in the river those going up the south side would have a much shorter distance to travel and would stand a chance to head off the thieves should they keep near the narrow bottoms.

We remained until my scouts had disappeared, and then returned to camp. During the evening some of our scouts came in and reported that they had found no trace of the missing man and horse. Early the next morning Williams and I mounted the mules and went up to the ranch, entertaining a hope that possibly we might hear something from the boys who were from the boys who were still out. I had resolved to keep those mules under my eyes from that time on, hence the reason for having ridden them that morning.

Mr. Cook was like all old Texans in those days, generous to a fault when at his house, and while you were welcome to stay as long as you wished, yet he would employ any and all arts to blister you in a horse trade. Dr. Cox, was a Virginian.

Mr. Cook, the Doctor and the Yankee, who was introduced to me as Mr. Stanfield, were going several miles up the river that morning and pressed us



to go along. The Doctor took the lead and piloted us to an old ruin in which he seemed to take some interest. This ruin was about four miles above the ranch, and stood on an eminence overlooking the river valley on the east and south, while to the north a short distance away a small creek ran by and emptied into the Nueces. The walls were of white, soft limestone and were hoary with age. The ruin was known among the Mexicans and the few Irish and Americans in that region as "Casa Blanca" (white house), but no one professed to know its builders or for what purpose it had been erected. From the Casa Blanca we went to the Mann ranch a few miles above. This fine property was owned by a Mrs. Mann, and her horse and cow brand—a running M—was known from the San Antonio to the Rio Grande. We found the place wholly abandoned. The beautiful residence stood with doors ajar, and the silence of desolation brooded over the surroundings. Dr. Cox dismounted and led the way. In the rooms, once luxuriantly furnished, still remained some of the furniture, but that which held my attention most was the once magnificent library. From early childhood I had been a "book worm," and here spread out before me was the accumulated wisdom of the ages. Books on the chairs, on the tables, on the shelves—books everywhere, and for me, no time to read scarcely a title page. Every feature in this once elegant mansion betokened former wealth, culture and refinement. The sons had gone away to war, while mother and sisters not caring to hazard their lives on a ranch remote from others and exposed to the rapacity of border ruffians had retired to Goliad, leaving their vast herds of stock and their pretty home to the mercies of the Bedouins of the border.

Cook and Williams left us and went to look after some stock, and we started on our return. When we had gone some distance the doctor opened a magazine he had secured at the ranch and began to read as we proceeded at a slow gait. This gave me opportunity to fall back and engage Mr. Stanfield in conversation. I told him how I came to be there, my destination, etc., and if he wanted to escape I was there to lead him safely to Matamoras. He asked me if I was in earnest or was I jesting with him in his misfortune. He would gladly go; he

would take any risk; his people in Illinois were well-to-do and if I would provide a way for his escape, I would be amply rewarded some day. Before reaching the ranch a plan of escape was agreed upon, on condition that Ciriaco's horse was recovered.

As most of our stock had been on the grass during the day, that night we staked them and put out our guard. It was a delightful clear evening, and we sat around and talked on various subjects until a late hour, when we were startled by the appearance of three horsemen approaching from the direction of the ferry. They were Ciriaco, Shoffit and Kendrick. They had caught the thieves and recovered the horses. Ciriaco would have but little to say about the capture, but Shoffit and Kendrick said it beat a circus. Near the spot where the capture was made, was a small mot of naqua trees. The two boys could not understand Spanish very well, but said they never heard so many "Carrajos" (a Mexican curse word) in all their lives. They stood by as spectators to see the fun, while Ciriaco was spokesman, orator and executioner. He tied El Zarco, the pelado, to a small naqua, stripped all his clothes off and whipped him most unmercifully with his quirt. The boys declared that he would have beaten him to death had they not interfered and stopped the performance. Not being satisfied with the beating he gave him he tore and cut every rag of his clothing, even his shoes into fragments and turned him loose stark naked. The Mexican with El Zarco could speak a little English and protested his innocence. He was a young lad, and as they had no proof against his being caught in bad company, they let him off easy.

The next morning, accompanied by Ciriaco and three others of my most trustworthy men, I went up to Dr. Cox's. On the road I told these men my plans for getting the Yankee out of his trouble. When we reached the Doctor's it was quite probable that I would have no chance to talk with the prisoner, as my host would occupy all of my time, and, moreover, if seen talking with Stanfield suspicions would be aroused. One of the boys could get him aside and instruct him to be at Lago Cayman that night between 9 and 10 o'clock without fail. I had noticed while at the ranch the previous day a McLelland saddle, the kind used by the Federal cavalry at Browns-



ville, and he was to be instructed to bring a light army saddle, a bridle and a stake rope which he could easily carry.

We remained a couple of hours at Dr. Cox's. I told the Doctor and his family that the object of my visit was to thank them for the kind favors shown me; that I was going to leave immediately, and sincerely hoped that at some future day we might meet again under more favorable circumstances. By way of parenthesis I want to say that on this and my previous visit I took note of the three sons of Dr. Cox. James, the eldest, who was about my age, later became one of the dearest boyhood friends I ever knew. Alex, another son, was some ten or twelve years old, while the youngest—Lennie they called him—was a wee blue-eyed lad about four years old and was the pet of the family. He is now a prosperous merchant of Ozona, Texas, and Crockett county has not a more popular upright citizen than L. B. Cox.

During our stay at Dr. Cox's I observed that one of our men was engaged in conversation with Stanfield and I made my stay sufficiently long to enable him to explain fully every detail of my plan. When we left the ranch one of the men told me to be on my guard, as Cook had left early that morning and he believed he was getting his crowd together and if possible arrest us on some pretext or other. He was hated by the Mexicans, and at all hazards I should be on my guard. (While seated at his table writing, Cook was shot and instantly killed by a Mexican shortly after the close of the war).

It was about 10 miles from the Nueces to Banquette, which was then a very small village on Agua Dulce creek, and directly on the road to King's ranch and Brownsville. We rode to the Agua Dulce that evening leaving Banquett two or three miles to the right and went into the brush, struck camp and waited for night to shelter further operations. When it became dark, four of us rode back to Cayman and lingered there until our man came up with his saddle and bridle swinging across his shoulder. We had an extra horse ready for him and by midnight we were safe in camp on the Agua Dulce. I aroused the boys and told them to saddle up, we must get in the chaparal beyond King's ranch just as soon as possible. None could be in more need of sleep than I, but our safety

now depended on speed in getting out of the country and I did not want to be taken, tried by court martial and shot for having aided in the escape of a Yankee prisoner. Daylight found us snugly encoined in the brush where we spent the day, taking turns in watching and sleeping. In the forenoon I found time to study my new recruit. He told me of his boyhood, his home life, his enlistment and his final capture. He was in the trenches around Vicksburg during the siege and was with Banks when the latter took Brownsville. He was a member of the Church of United Brethren and had tried to live right in the army. He showed me a little Bible his mother gave him the day he marched away to the war. When captured by the rebels his little book was about all they had left him and when he slipped away from his captors he had purloined a morral in which to safely carry this precious old book, which in truth, was about all the baggage the poor fellow had to get off with. That evening before resuming our night journey, he asked if we objected to his praying before starting. I told him that I believed in prayer, and we all would kneel with him. From that time until we reached Matamoras that devout soldier prayed every morning and evening, and his walk and conversation showed that he was a noble type of a God-fearing, faithful young Christian.

That night after having passed King's ranch, we bore off in the direction of Rancho Los Olmes, 30 miles distant. Los Olmes was a quiet secluded place, far from the main line of travel, and was rarely visited by Americans. There were some five or six jacals, with as many families, Mexicans, and all seemed very poor. The country alternated between dense chaparal and prairie, grass was abundant and there was no dearth of

Feeling quite safe and thirty miles on the main line of travel we decided to rest at Rancho Los Olmes a couple of days and give our horses needed rest. Grass was excellent, rich and nutritious and the simple Mexicans were kind and hospitable. The morning after our arrival a Captain with 30 men, all Mexicans, belonging to Benevides' regiment of cavalry, C. S. A. came up and went into camp within fifty yards of our bivouac.

Before unsaddling, a bunch of their men shot a fine beef steer that with other cattle had come to the watering place, and while some built fires others engag-

ed in dressing the beef and ere long the aroma of barbecued meats filled the air. The owner of the animal came out and protested, the captain offered him ten dollars Confederate money, which was refused. This refusal gave the Captain mortal offence. He told the old Mexican who was being ruthlessly robbed that his refusal to accept the national currency showed that he was a traitor to his country and that he ought to be shot. He, the captain, with his men had been detailed to procure a large herd of beeves to feed the hungry soldiers that were fighting for their country; he had orders to pay ten dollars a head Confederate money, (worth then about 10 cents or less on the dollar), and when a cattle owner refused that offer, he was a traitor and his stock would be taken and no pay would he get.

These men were well mounted, armed and better dressed than any Confederate soldier I had ever seen. The captain offered to divide beef with us and became very friendly. When he asked me to what command I belonged I told him I was captain of my company and we had been detailed on a scout through that section and report to the commandant at Rancho Davis; that we were short of coffee and sugar and if he had any of those luxuries to spare I hoped he would honor a small requisition. Certainly, he didn't have much on hand, but he would be more than glad to accommodate a comrade in arms—and we got fourteen pounds of real high grade coffee and two dozen peloncillos—the only kind of sugar they had.

In conversation, this captain admitted the stealing of live stock and justified the act by saying that it was for the benefit and maintenance of the army. He further stated with much humor, that in the organization of the regiment the authorities were told that if ten companies of Mexicans were incorporated in one regiment with Mexican officers, they would steal every thing in sight from El Paso to Boca del Rio Grande. "Acting upon this advice," said he "they had attached two companies of Americans to our regiment and it turned out they can steal more in one day than we can in a life time. They steal cotton and grab the customs revenues, while we are sent out to press beeves and horses for the government and when these are driven across the river and sold they pocket the proceeds, barely allowing us our monthly

pay of sixteen dollars, specie, our sugar, coffee, clothing etc."

We rested two days at Los Olmes and in the morning we left, one of the captain's men told Ciriaco that they had rounded up over six hundred fine beeves during the past day and a half and that they would get as many more before leaving. I wish to say in this connection that I do not vouch for the truth of this Mexican captain's statement, I merely relate the story as 'twas told to me. At the time, I had no occasion to give it discredit.

Our next objective point was a crossing on the Rio Grande, some miles below Rancho Davis. I had learned from the Mexican captain at Rancho Los Olmes, that one of the two American companies of his (Benavide's) Regiment was posted at Rancho Davis. Knowing the cupidity of these soldiers stationed on the Rio Grande, I had no desire to meet but rather cherished a fervent desire to avoid their presence. However, we traveled leisurely, gave our horses ample time to rest and graze, when we reached a point about eight miles from Rancho Davis we fell in with two Mexicans, the elder of whom informed us that he owned a ranch four miles below Ranch Davis and invited us to go by and accept his hospitality as there was to be a baile (dance) at his ranchito that night and we would be entirely welcome.

I sized this man up as being an all round picaro, a fawning rascal that would do to watch. We had halted when he and his company came up and after listening to his invitation to his fandango I told of our situation and desire to cross the river without encountering a position from the Confederates. He told me that there was a hard set of troops at Rancho Davis, that they were a gang of ladrones and that they patrolled the river with great diligence in order to arrest those who were trying to get out of the Confederacy into Mexico and that unless a man was well acquainted with the country and the crossings on the river he would surely be caught by the guards if he attempted to cross. He knew every goat trail in the country, knew of a safe crossing, where the current was not swift, some miles below the Post; a friend had a small boat there in which we could cross over and swim our stock. He would pilot us to the place, procure the boat, and assist in crossing the horses for \$25.



I was possessed of a fair knowledge of Mexican character and proceeded to turn it to account. I told him we did not need a pilot, that some of us had a knowledge of the country and that we didn't care for getting our clothes wet, that we had crossed several rivers on this trip by swimming, but if he was willing to lead the way and secure the little boat I would give him six dollars, which would be fair wages, for one night's work.

After some further haggling, he accepted the offer and asked us to go to his ranch and get supper before going further. At the ranch we found that preparations were being made for a grand baile that night. The women were cooking tortillas, tamales, chili con carne and brewing coffee. These refreshments were to be served only to those able to pay for them. The orchestra was already on the grounds and regaled our attentive ear with choice selections from their repertoire. The orchestra consisted of only three pieces; a wheezy old fiddle, a clarionette that bore a very ancient appearance, and a barrel with a rawhide stretched over the ends. This rude instrument served as a drum and at each interlude, amateurs almost fought for the privilege of pounding the vibrant rawhide. Quite a number had assembled and the national game, monte, was in evidence. Seated on a blanket spread upon the ground, the man with two or three dollars in small change and a deck of Mexican cards, could open a Monte bank, and unless some shrewd compadre with sufficient wealth to tap, win and break his pile, was liable to play all night and go home the next day with about the same amount of money. Among these rancho's "bucking at Monte" is a craze, and women, old and young, crowd the card table the same as the men.

I cautioned the boys to stay close together and to keep an eye on our stock, which was tethered nearby. We were in a tough crowd among whom, judging from their looks, were men who for a dollar would "cut a throat or scuttle a ship", if opportunity offered. We partook freely of their food preparations, paying for all we consumed and at dusk we rounded up our compadre and set out for the river, which without mishap we crossed and found ourselves safe at last. On the west bank of the river, we slept soundly, refreshingly and undisturbed, and the sun was up shining brightly

when we arose to breakfast on a scant ration of dried beef. But we were happy; overjoyed at the thought of having reached a country where Home Guards and conscript officers could not disturb or molest, and we thought that Stanfield's prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance was longer and more fervent than usual that morning.

From the place of our bivouac on the west bank of the Rio Grande we pursued a southwesterly course through chaparala and nopal until we came to the Camargo and Matamoras road. This was one of the most prominent highways in the valley and we had not proceeded far along this road in the direction of Matamoras when we met a company of soldiers. They belonged to the liberal or Juarez forces and by their enemies, the Imperialists were called Rojos, liberales, and guerrillas. The lieutenant, who commanded this squad, informed us that the French army had taken Monterey and were advancing on Matamoras and that the Liberal General, Menez, was concentrating his forces for the defense of the city and that we were likely to see some desperate fighting before another week had passed.

Nothing daunted, we pushed forward and in due time, reached the end of our journey.

Matamoras is situated on the south bank of the Rio Grande and the country away from the city, south, north, and west, is one vast plain and the spires of the city may be seen from a great distance. It was with feelings of extreme delight that I beheld once more the tall steeples over the great cathedral and as we rode into the city late in the evening, no music ever sounded sweeter than those evening bells, as they rang out from the great belfry at the cathedral.

After supper Mr. Cox was sent for, and his joy and surprise was excessive. He remained with us until morning and had many questions to ask concerning his family on the Colorado. I placed in his hands the quilt which he gave me, five weeks before, and told him his good wife, with her own hands, had extracted from its concealment the letter he had enclosed for her and in its stead had placed a reply.

There were no banks in Matamoras at the time of which I write and many Americans, Mr. Cox among others, kept their money in the safe in the consulate. The morning after our arrival Mr. Cox



asked me to go to the consul's office and he would pay me. He suggested that we all—my entire crowd—go over and call on the consul. This we agreed to and saddling our stock we mounted and with the two mules rode over and drew up in front of the consulate. Mr. Cox went in and in a few minutes came out with Mr. Pierce, the consul. There were twenty-four all told in my crowd, twenty Texans, whom I had been instrumental in leading into Mexico and the Yankee whom we had run off with, and my man Ciriaco. The consul spoke flatteringly of the achievement, took charge of Mr. Stanfield and retired. Mr. Cox paid me the \$200, gold, and didn't complain at the expense account.

\* \* \* \*

Reader, this closes the story of "Heel Fly Time in Texas." I hope it has proven entertaining and instructive. I have made no attempt at verbal embellishment. I have stated plain, unvarnished facts. There are those living near San Angelo and elsewhere in West Texas, who know a number of the circumstances related, and there be those who know many of the parties mentioned. You would doubtless know something of my faithful Mexican, Ciriaco; something more of Mr. Stanfield.

As to the latter, a few days after having reached Matamoras, he bade me goodbye and stated that he was on the eve of departing, by water, for his command on San Padre Island. I never heard more of him.

Ciriaco re-enlisted in the Liberal army under the brave General Mendez and fought gallantly through the war against the Imperialists. He was in General Escobedo's army at the siege of Quarretario and witnessed the execution of the Emperor Maximillian, June 19, 1867. He now lives on his hacienda near Victoria in the state of Tamaulipas.

The boys readily obtained employment in Matamoras and I learned later that some of them enlisted in the Liberal Army under Juarez and assisted in the overthrow of the Maximillian empire.

The American consul sent for me a few days after our arrival in Matamoras and offered me a handsome reward if I would go back into Texas and manage to release the San Padre Island prisoners that were still being held near San Patricio, but I respectfully declined, preferring a quiet, uneventful life in Mexico, to the hazardous and uncertain chances of being chased by Home Guards during Heel Fly Time in Texas.

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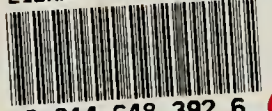


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